



## Seven in Heaven by mcplestreet

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**Summary:** Mike figured the day he and his friends got invited to a party was the day the world was going to end. That day happened in October of his junior year. In the basement of Jennifer Hayes' house a game of spin the bottle is the catalyst for change in his life in a completely unexpected way. The first change being Jane Hopper.  
COMPLETE

## 1. Spin the Bottle

Mike Wheeler had been invited to a party. It was a miracle. He figured the day he and his friends got invited to a party was the day the world was going to end. That day happened in October of his junior year. Jennifer Hayes, clutching a stack of papers up to her chin, marched up to every table at lunch and handed out party invitations. Not only had she handed out one to each of the boys but she'd even smiled at Will when she gave him his invitation. The world was surely about to end.

He knew that his family would make a big deal about him going to a party so he lied and said that he and his friends were hanging out at Dustin's house. A big deal not because they would be worried about them but because of the shock that he'd been invited to one in the first place. Mike considered telling Nancy after the fact. Her teasing was something he could handle.

Lucas, who was the only one in the group with a license *and* a car, picked them all up the night of the party. Jennifer's house could be spotted the second they pulled onto the street. Cups and drunken teenagers were scattered across her lawn and a few even made it out to the street. The noise was deafening when they walked inside and the crowd made Mike feel a bit like a sardine tightly packed in a can.

In the living room couples were dancing in a way that would be rated PG 13 if it were in a movie. In the kitchen people were taking shots and raiding the refrigerator. Each of the boys took a cup of punch from a large bowl on the kitchen table. From the first sip alone Mike could tell it was spiked. None of them seemed to mind too much to Mike took little sips until he started to get used to the way it burned his throat.

They wandered around the house looking for some place where they could fit comfortably. In the dining room Jennifer was dancing on the table with a guy on the football team. Just before they wandered out of the room someone started throwing money at her. After doing a once over of the whole first floor they decided to retreat down to the basement. Hopefully it would be a bit calmer down there.

With the basement door closed behind them most of the party crowd was muffled. They walked down into an interesting group of people. The few couches in the basement were occupied by couples sitting uncomfortably close to one another. There was a passed out boy on an arm chair, a few people sitting by themselves, and two girls sitting in the opposite corner talking to one another quietly. Mike recognized Max Mayfield from his algebra class and was pretty sure he'd seen her talking to the girl next to her before. Her brown curly hair that just reached her chin was vaguely familiar. The four boys claimed a spot by the bottom of the stairs and sipped on their drinks while they chatted quietly amongst themselves.

They'd only been downstairs for about ten minutes when the door opened again. A slightly drunk Margret Wilson stumbled down the steps with a bottle in her hand. She had unofficially been crowned coolest girl in school when she started dying streaks of color in her hair in the sixth grade. When they got back summer vacation on the first day of junior year she had a nose piercing and her hair was dyed a deep teal color, which was still fading the night of the party. Dustin had a bit of a crush on her, though he'd never verbally admitted it to them. The look on his face when she came downstairs was enough of a giveaway. There was never a need for him to admit it.

Once she reached the bottom of the stairs she downed the remaining beer in the bottle and looked across the room. "Guess the real party's down here." She said sarcastically as she walked over to a radio sitting on an end table. Margret flipped through stations until she landed on some pop song Mike didn't know, not nearly as loud as the music upstairs, and turned back to everyone else. "Anyone up for spin the bottle?" she asked.

Dustin practically choked on his drink. Margret didn't seem to notice.

She made her way over to an uneasy looking couple sitting on the couch. "Come on, it's just a little game guys. It doesn't mean anything." She grabbed their hands and pulled them to their feet. "I didn't chug this beer for nothing."

The only people who didn't budge were Mike and his friends and the two girls sitting across the room from them. And the boy who was passed out.

Margret noticed their hesitation and frowned at them. "You boys don't want to play with us?"

Mike just managed to make out Lucas whispering in Dustin's ear "If you don't I will." Before getting to his feet. Dustin followed shortly after. Mike and Will, a bit more reluctantly, got up and joined the circle.

Just as he sat down he saw Max pulling her friend over to the group. The look on the girls' face was a perfect depiction of his own reluctance. She sent a glare at her friend as she took the empty spot next to Margret, who was wearing a wide smile. "Oh, and by the way." She announced before grabbing the bottle and giving it a strong spin, "We're not just doing spin the bottle. We're going seven minutes in heaven."

Mike had to hold himself back from groaning.

The bottle slowed until it stopped. It was aimed somewhere between Dustin and Will. Mike leaned forward to catch a glimpse of Dustin staring wide eyed at the bottle with his mouth hanging open slightly. It didn't surprise him much when Will spoke up and said "I think it's more on you."

Margret got to her feet, straightened her skirt, and flashed him a grin. "Come on, Henderson." She said. The look on Dustin's face was absolutely priceless as he followed her across the room and into the closet.

The door closed behind them and the room fell silent, aside from the music. Lucas made a joke about Dustin needed to be restarted after his seven minutes that they all chuckled at. At about minute five the girl next to Max got to her knees and started to stand up. Max grabbed her hand and tugged her back down to the floor, whispering "You'd rather be up there?" the girl didn't try to get up again.

Pairs took turns spinning and going in and out of the closet. Margret was good at holding up a conversation to keep things from getting awkward. While Lucas and a senior girl named Jessie were in the closet she looked over at the three of them that remained.

"You guys are in the AV club, right?" she asked as she reached over and grabbed the drink Lucas had left behind. When they nodded in agreement she pointed a finger at Mike. "You're the president?"

He couldn't help but be a little shocked that Margaret Wilson knew something about him. She was elite-level cool. "Yeah."

"That's cool." The three of them exchanged a glance as she took a sip. *Cool?* "You have to be, like, super smart to do that kind of stuff. I could never figure it out."

For the first time since they'd been in the closet together Dustin seemed to regain the ability to speak. "It just takes a bit of practice. It's not really that hard."

She nodded her head a few times. "Maybe I'll stop by sometime. You guys can teach me something."

Dustin's face looked red enough to catch on fire.

When Lucas and Jessie returned back to the circle Margaret was once again sporting a large smile. "I think Mr. President should go next."

Mike wanted to protest. He wanted to be a spectator only. In his life he'd kissed one girl on vacation before the eighth grade. It had been alright. Not an experience he was dying to relive. Especially not in Jennifer Hayes' basement while admittedly a bit tipsy. But everyone was watching him expectantly and he didn't have the backbone to say no. Mike was a people pleaser. Plus he figured he would talk his way out of doing anything with whoever it landed on.

The bottle spun.

Then it slowed. And slowed. And slowed. Until it stopped.

His eyes met with a wide and slightly frightened pair of brown ones sitting opposite from him. The girl who had previously gotten up to leave looked back and forth between him and the bottle that was pointing directly at her. A small chorus of 'oh's made it impossible to hear what Max whispered in her ear. The girl didn't wait for him as she stood up and headed for the closet. Mike purposely didn't look at his friends as he followed her across the room. He didn't even know

her name, how was he supposed to kiss her? For seven whole minutes? He managed to catch a glimpse at her pink cheeks before he closed the closet door behind him. Darkness and silence fell over them and it was instantly awkward.

Through the darkness he managed to sense her movement before light flooded the small closet. She let go of the chain hanging from the light bulb and let her hand drop back down to her side. The girl wore a pair of converse, jeans, and jean jacket over a black t-shirt. He couldn't help but notice that she was cute, which only made him a little bit more nervous.

Mike cleared the lump that had settled in his throat. "We, uh, don't have to do anything."

She offered him a small smile. "Thanks." She said quietly. "I'm Jane, by the way."

Once she said her name he knew where he recognized her from. She was the Chiefs daughter that he'd adopted a few years back. Her first day of school was back in ninth grade. Though he'd never spoken to her before Mike had heard the rumors that followed her around school. That Hopper had arrested her drug addict mother and took her in. That she was from Indianapolis and had a criminal record of her own. That she had gotten caught smoking in the girls' bathroom her first week at school. Generally, all the rumors were about her outrageous reputation. But seeing her so shy and embarrassed made him question them even more.

"I'm Mike." He said, "Wheeler."

Her smile twitched wider. "Mr. President Mike Wheeler?" He rolled his eyes and pretended to be annoyed but his cheeks had flushed bright red. "I bet any boy would kill to have Margret Wilson smile at them like that."

Mike simply shrugged. "My friend is really into her. Besides, she's not really my type."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "The one that went into the closet with her?" when he nodded she smiled even more. "I can tell."

He laughed. "I'm pretty sure the whole universe can tell."

Jane shifted her weight from one foot to the other. In the minute and a half that they'd been alone she was starting to relax. "I'm not usually a party person." She admitted. "But Max made me come because she heard the guy she likes got invited and she didn't want to come alone." She laughed and leaned her head back against the wall. "Next thing I know I'm half drunk and playing spin the bottle with the whole AV club."

Even with both of them leaning against the wall they were so close their legs touched. Neither of them tried to move, but there wouldn't have been much room if they wanted to. "Yeah, I bet it's every girls dream to be in the closet with the AV club president."

She shrugged. "Margret seemed to think AV club is pretty cool." Jane said. "And I do too. My dad's not super up to date on technology. Pretty much all we have is the TV and radios. I haven't had too much exposure."

"Well what Dustin said is true. It's not that hard." He told her. "Maybe you and Margret could stop by together."

Jane laughed again. He tried to ignore how cute her laugh was. "I think I'll just come with Max. If I can convince her."

They fell silent once again and listened to the chatter coming from outside. Mike was pretty sure he could hear Margret singing along to a Cyndi Lauper song. Another minute or two passed before Mike spoke up again. "Aren't you scared your dad's going to bust this party and you'll get in trouble?"

"That's exactly while I made sure I was still at least a little coherent." She told him. Jane then reached into her pocket and pulled out a pack of mint gum. "As long as he doesn't smell it on my breath I'm good."

"That's pretty genius."

She smiled again and pulled out a strip of gum and handed it to him. "Just in case." She added as he took it.



"Thanks."

From outside the door they both heard Margret calling to them "Two minutes, lovebirds! Start putting your clothes back on!"

Jane's face turned just as red as his felt. She cleared her throat quietly before speaking again. "Well thanks for, you know, not being pushy or anything. I'm not hammered but I've had enough that I'm probably not the best decision maker right now."

Mike grinned. As an inexperienced drinker he had a feeling he was one more cup of punch away from being at the same level of drunkenness. "It's okay. I could tell you weren't thrilled about the idea about playing."

"Well, that was back when I thought I was going to get stuck with the senior guy who's on the football team." She said. "You're okay."

His reply got caught in his throat when she pushed herself off the wall and took the single step that separated them. The top of her head just reached his chin and there was only a few inches in between them. Mike wondered if it was quiet enough for her to hear his pounding heart. He wished he could read her mind to make sure she was thinking was he thought she was thinking.

"Can I tell you a secret?" she said, her voice quieter than before. Mike wasn't confident his voice would work so he simply nodded. "I've never kissed a boy before."

"Wow." Was all Mike could manage to choke out. She was probably thinking what he thought she was thinking.

"I know." She agreed. Jane put her hands on his shoulders. Her hands felt warm even over his sweatshirt. "Is this okay?"

"Yeah."

She was *definitely* thinking what he thought she was thinking.

Jane stared at her for just a moment longer before shutting her eyes, standing on her toes, and pressing her lips to his. Mike's body felt like the grand finale of a firework show on the 4th of July. The one kiss

he'd had down in Florida on vacation was absolutely nothing compared to kissing Jane. Whether it was the party setting, the alcohol in his system, or her that made it so different he wasn't sure. Either way it made him wonder why he hadn't tried giving kissing another chance sooner.

He pushed himself off the wall and wrapped his arms around her waist, both in an attempt to get closer to her. Their lips moved like ballet dancers, gentle and passionate all at the same time. Every hair on his body stood on its end when her hands slowly moved up and into his hair. How, for years and years, had this girl passed him by totally unnoticed? Either she was good at hiding or Mike was completely oblivious.

He wished they could stay there forever.

But the sound of someone's fist pounding on the door practically made both of them jump out of their skin. They stared wide eyed at each other while adrenaline made his heart pound. Margret's voice quickly followed her aggressive knock. "Time's up, you two!" she called.

Jane was the first to move. She pushed her hair away from her face and flashed him a small smile. "See you out there."

She reached up and shut off the light. Only seconds later the door opened and he watched her walk out. His limbs felt like lead but he forced himself to follow her out. As soon as he returned to the spot he'd been sitting in before he took his turn he picked up his red plastic cup and drank the remaining spiked punch.

Will, who sat next to him, leaned over and whispered in his ear "Your face is as red as that cup."

Mike sent him a halfhearted glare in response. As the next person reached forward to spin the bottle in the middle of the group his gaze met with Jane's once again. She was whispering to Max too low for him to hear. Jane smiled at him once more before she continued what he was sure was a recap of their time in the closet.

## 2. A Walk to Remember

wow it's been a minute since I updated this story. or anything for that matter. I'm trying really hard to write stuff guys I swear. Anyway, enjoy this update!

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"I think I'm still hungover."

"The party was three days ago."

Just like every Tuesday the four boys headed to the AV club room. Back in September Mike had convinced the schools secretary to give him a copy of the key for the room so he wouldn't have to borrow it every week. It was, by far, the most satisfying addition to his key chain so far.

The days following the party were interesting to say the least. Mike has spent all day Sunday locked in his room with a killer headache and an uneasy stomach. By Monday he felt better physically but was surprisingly overcome with nerves when he made it to the front entrance of the school. Between classes he was constantly looking around him, wondering if he would see Jane. But, just as she had for years, she remained under the radar.

While Mike had not let one detail slip about being in the closet with Jane Dustin seemed incapable of talking about anything other than Margret. By the time they reached he club room Lucas was threatening to slash Dustin's bike tires if he didn't shut up. Dustin mumbled something about him being jealous but he let the topic go.

Once inside the room they all took their seats around their newest addition to the room. The latest model of Heathkit radios. It was larger than the one they already had and had way more switches and buttons. But it was still fascinating.

The radio had been donated by someone in town because it no longer worked as it had when they bought it. Some of the switches were stiff and not every channel worked. The boys had been reading up on how to fix something so complicated, hence why Lucas picked up a copy

"Do you think we'll get this thing fixed by Christmas?" Will asked curiously.

Lucas looked up from the book and glanced at the calendar on the wall. It was mid-October, which left them a fair amount of time. Mike was sure they would get it done, but Lucas shook his head. "I don't know. We need parts. We might need to order them. They may not come for a while."

They all deflated a bit. They'd been working on the radio for weeks trying to figure out what exactly needed to be fixed and how to do it. Needless to say they were anxious for the final result.

The three of them fiddled with the radio for about half an hour while Lucas read as fast as he could. A soft knock on the door made them all drop what they were doing and look in the doorway. No one ever stopped in to check on them. Mike felt his heart stop for a second when he spotted Jane standing in the doorway with Max standing behind her.

"Am I interrupting something?" she asked

Mike was vaguely aware of his friends looking back and forth between Jane and him. He felt a bit caught off guard that she'd showed up out of nowhere after he's spent the past two days trying to spot her. "Uh, no." he finally managed to answer. "No, nothing."

Jane took two steps into the door before Max grabbed the sleeve of her shirt. "Billy's probably waiting for me." She said once Jane turned back to her. "I can't be late again, I have to go."

"Yeah, okay." Jane said. "I'll see you tomorrow?" Max nodded before disappearing down the hall. When Jane turned back to them she grabbed the one spare chair in the room, which happened to be next to Mike. "Billy is her brother. He has a bit of a temper." She set her backpack down on the floor and looked over at the radio on the table. "What's this?"

"Only the finest piece of machinery in the whole school." Dustin

answered dramatically.

Mike rolled his eyes and turned in his chair to face her. "It's a radio. All these switches are different channels in different parts of the world. There's one in Australia." He picked up the headphones and handed them to her. "Want to try it?"

A small smile spread on her face as she took them from him. "Sure."

He slid the microphone over to her and turned on one of the channels. He caught Will's eye and tried to ignore the slightly smug smile on his face. Jane slid the headphones over her ears and Mike guessed someone was already using the channel by the way her eyes went wide and her mouth went open.

She put her hand over the microphone and whispered "It's an Italian airline."

Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "How do you know it's Italian."

"I've been taking the class since eighth grade." She told him. Part of him desperately wanted for her to say something in Italian but after a few minutes of listening she took the headphones off. "That's so cool."

"Too bad it's busted." Lucas said before marking his page and tossing the book it on the table. "We need a dozen things to fix it, which means we have to order parts. They could take forever to get here. Plus we need money?"

A small frown settled on Jane's face. "What's wrong with it?"

"Some of the channels don't work." Mike explained. He switched on a channel that they'd heard nothing but static from. "At first we thought it was a bad connection, but a bunch of them are like this."

Jane put the headphones back on. After a few moments her frown only deepened. "Are all the broken ones like this?"

"No." Will told her. "Some of them don't make any noise at all."

She took off the headphones again and slid her chair closer to the radio. Which also meant she was closer to Mike. "Well, with that one

it's probably just a loose wire." Her eyes scanned the desk before landing on a small collection of tools they'd accumulated. "Hand me that screwdriver."

Dustin gave it to her. "How can you be so sure?" he asked skeptically.

"I'm not sure." She said as she began to unscrew the control panel cover. "But my dad has a police radio. They probably work the same. If it's static and it's not a connection problem it's usually a wire problem."

Mike and his friends exchanged a glance as she took off the cover and started poking through wires. He was the only one who was able to see what she could. But all he could make out was one big knot of colors. How was she supposed to make any sense of it?

Apparently it wasn't a problem for her. She picked out a green wire that had been split into two pieces. Her other hand reached for a piece of tape which she wrapped around both ends of the wire to keep them together. "Try it now." She told Mike.

He picked up the headphones and slid them over his head. Sure enough instead of hearing static he heard a male voice on the other end of the channel. Mike quickly took them off and stared at her. "We've been trying to figure out how to fix this thing for months and you got it in two seconds." He said. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Dustin and Lucas glance at one other.

Jane simply shrugged. She clearly wasn't impressed with herself as they all were. "There's probably still a few problems, and the wire thing is pretty much the only thing I know. You'll probably still need that book."

They spent the remaining twenty minutes flipping through the channels to keep track of which ones had been fixed and which ones still needed repair. Though only a handful had started working it was still more than they'd had before Jane started to stop by. It was almost 4:30 when they decided to pack it up for the day.

Jane walked with them out to the parking lot. She had more in common with them than they had all thought. While she wasn't quite

as geeky as they all were she was a fan of horror movies and more than occasionally opted for sci-fi. Her and Will liked the same music and when Dustin told them about the box of Nilla wafers waiting for him at home Jane seemed genuinely jealous.

Will got into Lucas' car to get a ride home while Dustin hopped on his bike and followed them out of the parking lot, but Mike hung back for a second. Jane was zipping up her jacket when he turned to her. "Do you have a ride home?" he asked.

"My dad usually picks me up. But he's working late tonight." She told him. "I was going to walk home."

"Where do you live?" the second the words left his lips Mike regretted them. He hadn't intended to sound so... stalker like. Like he always did when he got embarrassed he started to ramble. "I mean, generally. Not, like, your address. I didn't mean it like that. I was just wondering if you live far from-"

He stopped talking when she started laughing. Her eyes squeezed shut and all her teeth were on display. Mike did his best to not notice how cute she was. "It's okay. I know what you meant." She said, still giggling. "I live on Maple."

Mike let out a short breath of relief. "Oh, okay." Her smile was contagious and he felt his lips moving upwards on their own accord. "I live pretty close to there. I can walk with you?"

"Sure."

He held onto the handle bars of his bike and pulled it along with him as they walked. Jane was wearing combat boots that gave her an inch or two of extra height from the last time they'd stood next to one another. Mike kept his eyes fixed forward as they started away from the school. If he looked at her too long he thought about kissing her in the closet in Jennifer Hayes' basement.

"Hey," she said to break the silence. Her hands were gripped tightly around the straps of her backpack and her eyes were cast down to the paved road. "So, about the party... if I made you uncomfortable or anything, I'm sorry."

Mike hardly bothered to hide the confusion on his face as he looked down at her. "I wasn't. At all. It's okay." The shyness she had when they first got into the closet had returned. Yet another thing that made him try to ignore how cute she was.

"I was a little more drunk than I thought I was." Jane admitted. "Plus Max had been teasing me about my lack of experience with boys lately. I got a little carried away."

Mike chuckled, "Well I'm sorry that you got stuck with me as your first kiss."

Jane punched his arm and he pretended like it didn't hurt as much as it did. "Shut up." She said with a short laugh. "You're a good kisser. Not to mention a nice guy. Girls in school are missing out." The farther they walked the closer together they ended up. He didn't try and move away from her and she didn't seem to notice.

"I think they would disagree." He argued.

She shrugged, making one of the straps of her backpack slip off her shoulder slightly. "Well, then, their loss." Jane kicked a small rock that was in her path. "I still can't believe I got invited at all."

"You and me both." Mike agreed.

He heard her snort quietly. "No one wants to invite the Chiefs daughter to a wild party. They think I'll snitch on them. Plus there's the rumors." She looked up at him. "You hear the one where I pulled the fire alarm and got banned from homecoming?"

Mike let out a laugh. "No, not that one." He said. "Why is there so much talk about you, anyway?" though he never paid much attention to rumors he remembered hearing a few things about her. Plus his friends had told them all of what they'd heard about her after the party.

Jane sighed. "Well, it's a small town." She said. "People talk. They know I'm adopted, but they don't know why. So they make up stories." She looked down at the ground again. "Small town people have small town minds. Back in Chicago the school was so big that



no one knew who I was."

*Small town people have small minds.* It was the most accurate description of Hawkins he'd ever heard. "Do you miss Chicago?" he'd never been himself, but he imagined it was a hell of a lot more exciting there.

"A little bit." She told him, but he could tell her voice it was more than a *little*. "But I didn't have many friends there. Not that I'm super popular here. But I have Max. And my dad."

His gaze lingered on her for a second before he looked away. "Well, if it helps," he said, "I think you're really cool. For the Chiefs daughter."

Jane laughed again. It was a sound he could certainly get used to. "Yeah. You're pretty cool too. For the President of the AV club." She bumped her shoulder against his.

They only walked for a couple more minutes before Jane stopped. When he spotted the sign for her street his heart had sunk slightly. When would be the next time he got to talk to her? Especially in private.

"This is my place." She said, gesturing to the house behind her. It was a ranch house with a small garden in front. He figured Jane was the one with the green thumb in the family since gardening didn't seem to be Chief Hopper's thing. "I'd invite you inside but it's really messy."

"That's fine." Mike told her. "I don't know if I'd want the Chief to catch me home alone with his daughter."

Her smile grew, once again showing her teeth. "We should, uh, do something sometime." She suggested. "Maybe see a movie? That new Star Wars movie is coming out soon, I bet you guys are dying to see it."

They were.

Inside his chest Mike's heart was beating like a snare drum; quick and sharp. She wasn't asking him on a date. No way in hell she was. But she was the first girl who'd shown any interest in spending time with him, or with any of his friends. Plus Jane was funny and easy to be

around. Not to mention cute. Curls framed her face like an expensive frame and her lips were the most enticing shade of pink he'd ever seen. Without the party atmosphere and alcohol in his system Mike was fully capable of controlling himself around her. But that didn't mean he wasn't tempted.

"Yeah, that sounds good." He said, trying not to sound as excited as he was. "We could go the weekend it comes out? A couple days after so it's not so busy."

Jane nodded. "I can try and convince Max to come. But sci-fi isn't exactly her thing." She took a few steps towards her house. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Yeah." He said. "See you."

Mike waited until she unlocked the front door and disappeared inside her house before getting on his bike and turning around. They'd passed his street a few blocks back but he hadn't been ready to say goodbye to Jane yet. It was hard to tell if he was having left over feelings from the party or if they simply got a long better than he expected.

Talking with Jane felt like talking with someone he'd been friends with for years. She made him laugh, and he liked making her laugh. Mike wasn't used to having a friend that was a girl. The whole concept was foreign to him. While he wasn't sure if he could label Jane as a 'friend' quite yet he was pretty sure they were getting there.

When he walked through the front door of his house he spotted his mom on the phone in the living room. Since his dad's car was absent from the driveway he figured the only other person home was Nancy who had a few days off from classes at college and had come down to visit. Mostly to visit Johnathan.

Mike made it up the stairs and halfway down the hallway before his sisters door opened and she poked her head out. She stepped into the hall and put her hands on her hips. "I just got back from Johnathan's house." She told him.

He recognized the accusatory tone in her voice but didn't know what

to say. "Okay." He replied simply.

"Imagine my surprise when I drove past my little brother walking next to a girl. A cute one at that." She raised an eyebrow at him as a fresh coat of blush rose to his cheeks. "Let's talk." She said before heading back into her room.

Nancy always wanted to *talk*. He figured it was her way of making up for their parents' lack of interest. As annoying as it sometimes was he appreciated it. Mike followed her into her room and dropped his backpack onto the floor. She cleared off the papers and books spread out on her bed to make room for him. They sat cross legged across from each other.

"Who is she?" Nancy asked.

He sighed and leaned against the footboard of her bed. "Her name is Jane." He told her. "She's the Chiefs daughter."

Nancy's eyes widened slightly. "You're messing around with the Chiefs daughter?"

Mike grabbed a pillow and threw it at her. "We're not *messing around*." He said defensively. "We met at a party over the weekend. We were just walking together."

"Met at a party?" she asked. "Oh I know what *that* means."

He rolled his eyes while his face only got hotter. "It was a game of spin the bottle. But we didn't do anything, we just talked. Neither of us wanted to play the game in the first place." Mike Nancy wouldn't catch his lie.

Unfortunately for him Nancy had to learn to be observant as an aspiring journalist. "Oh, come *on*. You didn't do anything?" she challenged. "You're at a party, you're probably both a little tipsy. Alone in a closet together. You're telling me *nothing* happened?" her raised eyebrows and cheeky grin were a dare to keep lying to her.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Okay, okay, fine." He said. "She kissed me. It was quick. That was it." He tried to ignore the satisfied expression that she wore. "But it's not like that. It was a one-time thing. We're

just friends now."

"And you're okay with that?" she asked, clearly skeptical.

"Yes." He answered honestly. "I am. It was a one time thing and it's perfectly fine."

Nancy stared at him for a moment before leaning back against the pillows behind her. "Alright, alright." She said. "But if you ask me I think you should make a move."

"Which is exactly why I didn't ask."

She grinned at him and picked up a pillow before hitting his arm with it. "Don't you have homework to do or something?"

Mike rolled his eyes at her and got to his feet, grabbing his backpack off the floor on his way out. He grabbed his algebra homework and pulled out the chair of his desk. His eyes landed on the invitation to Jennifer's party that he'd yet to throw out. Throughout the night he'd had a few drinks which made his memories slightly fuzzy. But the seven minutes in the closet with Jane were crystal clear. The way she smiled at him, when their hands brushed when she offered him gum, how his heart hammered in his chest when she came closer to him.

It had been a really good kiss. And he found himself surprisingly content with the fact that it would probably be their only one.

### 3. Pet Cemetery

whoops it's been a minute since I updated this story! I hope you guys like this chapter and what I have planned in the future.

---

English was never Mike's favorite subject. In fact, it was one of his worst if not *the* worst. He was a fan of numbers and dates and definite answers. With literature everything was up to interpretation and he hated it. How was he supposed to know what the blue curtains and the white walls in the main characters bedroom ere a metaphor for? He had read the same page over and over again trying to find the answer to his homework and was no closer to finding it than he was when he first read the question. He decided to leave it blank and move onto the next one.

Only a minute or two later the sound of the phone ringing interrupted him. Mike made no move to answer it. The only people in the house who got phone calls were his mother and Nancy. Thanks to their supercoms there was never any need for his friends to use the phone to contact one another. unless it was some kind of emergency. Which, on a Saturday afternoon, he doubted it was. He had just started scribbling down his best guess to the next question on his homework when he heard Nancy's voice down the hall.

"Mike, it's for you!"

He set his pencil down and stared out into the hallway through his open door. "Really?" he called back. Maybe it was some kind of prank call from Troy or one of his friends.

He could hear Nancy's rushed footsteps coming down towards his room. She peeked in through the doorway with an ear to ear grin on her face that didn't sit with him quite right. "It's a girl."

The only girls he'd spoken in the past two weeks were Jane and Margret. And he seriously doubted Margret Wilson would take the time out of her day to call him. He pushed himself away from his desk and walked over to the phone on his nightstand. Before picking up the receiver he looked over at Nancy, who was watching

expectantly in the doorway. "Go away."

"No." she protested. "I want to listen."

Mike picked up a stray sneaker laying on the ground and threw it at her. She ducked out into the hallway again to get out of the way. "I'll tell you later, okay? But you can't listen. And don't listen in on your phone."

She glared at him. "Fine." She agreed. "I want a word for word recap."

He waited until he heard her bedroom door closing before picking up the phone and bringing it to his ear. His heart was beating excitedly in his chest and he tried to tell it to calm down. But, of course, it didn't listen. Mike cleared his throat quietly before speaking. "Hello?"

"Mike?"

It was definitely Jane. He recognized her voice even over the phone. "Yeah, hey."

"Hey. I got your number in the phone book. Is that alright?"

"Yeah, of course." Mike sat down on his bed and crossed his legs in front of him. In the days following when Mike walked her home Nancy's words echoed in his mind whenever he spotted her in the hallway. She waved to him whenever they crossed paths and had a quick conversation with him before homeroom the day before. Every time Nancy's voice nagged at the back of his mind; *are you okay with just friends?*

Of course he was. Nancy just had a way of getting into his head.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything." She said. "You're not busy, right?"

"No. I was just doing homework."

"Oh." He could hear her frowning as clear as he heard the disappointment in her voice.

"But I don't have a lot or anything." He quickly added. "What's up?"

He heard some rustling over the phone as if she was switching which ear she held it up to. "Well, um, I was thinking we could do something?" she asked. "There's this new horror movie that Max wanted to see, but it's a bit much even for me. I kinda wanted to see it once before I saw it with her so I don't seem like such a chicken. But I don't wanna go see it alone." She hesitated for a second. "Do you want to see it with me?"

Mike looked over at his homework sitting on his desk. He wasn't the bravest when it came to horror movies. But he was dying to take a break from his work. Plus he hadn't had much time to talk to Jane since they walked home a couple days earlier, not really. "Yeah, that sounds good. I can pick you up?"

"With a car?" she asked skeptically.

He was glad she wasn't there to see him blush. "I can borrow someone else's, yeah."

"Alright, I'll see you soon."

"Bye."

Mike hung up the phone and quickly grabbed a jacket from his closet. He braced himself for Nancy's reaction as he walked down the hall towards her room. But there was no way he was going to ask to borrow his mom's car. If there was any chance of her finding out about him hanging out with a girl he planned on avoiding it at all costs.

When he stood in the doorway of her room Nancy looked up from the textbook. "Well?" she asked as she set it down on the bed beside her. "What did she say?"

Mike's eyes scanned her room for her keys. "I need to borrow your car." He said when he discovered they were nowhere in sight.

Her eyebrows climbed high on her forehead. "And why exactly do you need to borrow my car?"

"Jane and I are going to see a movie." He told her somewhat reluctantly. "And I really don't feel like walking all the way to the

theatre. So please can I borrow your car?"

Nancy eyed him for a few moments before standing up and walking over to her purse on her dresser. He could hear her keys clinking before she even pulled them out. "One condition." She said to him. "You have to tell me everything."

"Fine." He lied. Mike already knew there was no way he would tell her absolutely everything, no matter what happened. Some things were best kept from his excitable older sister.

She handed him the keys and he thanked her over his shoulder as he rushed towards the stairs. Mike guessed his mom was working on dinner when he heard the oldies radio station playing in the kitchen. For a moment he considered telling her he might miss dinner. But he decided against it, guessing that they would figure it out.

The ride to Jane's house was only a few minutes at most. He told himself to relax, that getting nervous would just prove Nancy right. Mike took a deep breath as pulled onto her street. He parked in front of her house and instantly spotted her sitting on the front porch. As she got to her feet and hurried down the lawn he took note of the empty driveway. Was her dad working late again?

She opened the passengers' door and a wide smile spread on her face. "Thanks for doing this." She said as she closed it. "Max still hasn't stopped teasing me for covering my eyes during *Halloween*."

"Yeah that movie was pretty scary." He said as he pulled away from her house.

Jane leaned back in her seat. Mike could only imagine what his friends would say if they knew he was on his way to see a movie alone with her. It made him consider not mentioning it to them at all. "I'm still trying to convince Max to come with us this weekend." She told him. "I think she thinks she's too cool for Star Wars."

"No such thing."

She laughed, "Yeah, try telling her that."

The parking lot of the theatre was a bit more full than usual but he



managed to find a parking spot somewhat close to the entrance. Jane chatted about her classes as they walked inside and bought their tickets. She was his polar opposite when it came to academics, he could just tell. She gushed about a book she was reading in her honors English class that she had read in her spare time a few years back. Honors English sounded like Mike's worst nightmare, but he could tell by the smile on her face that it was her favorite class.

They bought popcorn and picked out seats in the last row, which they both agreed was the best row. "My friends all love sitting towards the front. I always come out with a cramp in my neck." He said.

"I know, me too." She agreed in between handfuls of popcorn. "My dad is too stubborn to admit he needs glasses so we always have to sit in the front row."

Mike groaned. "That sounds awful."

"It is." She looked over at him. "We should try and convince your friends to sit back here this weekend."

He shrugged. "Yeah maybe." He told her, though he knew it wasn't likely. "But Dustin is pretty stubborn. You'll see."

The lights fell and the previews started to play. With her eyes fixed on the screen Jane replied quietly so they wouldn't get shushed. "Maybe we can sit back here by ourselves, then."

Mike felt like his face was engulfed in flames. Not at the idea of sitting alone with Jane, of course, but the thought of the torture he'd have to go through if he did.

It didn't take Mike long to figure out why Jane needed someone to come with her to see the movie. Excessive amounts of gore and up-close shots of the characters wounds made him stop picking at the popcorn. He glanced over at Jane a handful of times to see how she was handling it. She stared at the screen, her eyes twice the size they normally were. About halfway through the movie the killer jumped into view and made half the people in the theatre scream. As his sudden surge of adrenaline wore off he felt something in his hand. He looked down to find Jane's fingers linked with his own. By the slight

death grip she used he figured she was even more scared than he had thought.

She kept her hand wrapped around his for the rest of the movie. Worrying if his hand was sweaty was a good distraction from the movie. When the credits started to roll and the lights turned back on he heard her take a deep breath seconds before her hand slipped away from his. Mike's heart was still pounding erratically from the gruesome end of the movie. She turned in her seat to face him after a few moments passed.

"I think I'll pretend I'm sick or something." She said. "I don't think I can see that again."

Mike knew for sure he was never going to see it again. "That sounds like a good idea."

They tossed their popcorn buckets into a trashcan by the door. The lights from the lobby burned his eyes slightly after being in the dark for so long. He squinted his eyes slightly until they adjusted to the light.

Jane rubbed her knuckles against her eyes and blinked a few times once her hands dropped back to her sides. "Thanks for this." She said. "You looked pretty scared."

"I wasn't." he said defensively.

She grinned at him. "Could have fooled me."

They started for the door but a voice behind them stopped Mike dead in his tracks. "Well, look what we have here."

There was no need to glance over his shoulder. Troy's voice made Mike's blood run cold and heart start to pound. Jane, who was a few paces ahead of him turned and caught his eye. He only hoped he didn't look as scared as he had during the movie.

"Am I hallucinating or is *Wheeler* hanging out with a girl?" Troy asked dramatically. His voice was closer than before and soon he spotted him in his peripheral vision. He turned to one of his friends. "Well I guess I owe you five bucks. You were right, he is straight."

Mike glanced at Jane, who was gripping onto her wallet so tightly that her knuckles had turned white. He opened his mouth to tell her that they should just go but the words never came out. She walked right over to Troy and the two friends he was with. While none of them were as tall as Mike was she still had to tilt her head back to look at them. "Why don't you shut your mouth, Harrington?"

Her words bounced off of him harmlessly. A smug grin spread on her face. "You know, you're actually kind of cute when you're angry, Hopper."

Mike's stomach went sour with anger. He was used to everything Troy said to him and his friends, but it was different with Jane. The things he could say to her were so much more offensive and degrading. He started towards them to try and pull her away. "You're even more stupid than I thought." She said, seemingly unphased by his comment. "How about you leave us alone or I'll go home and tell my dad that I know who beat up Dylan Demarco two weeks ago. And who brought the alcohol to Jennifer's party."

Troy's eyes looked back and forth between him and Jane. The smug grin had fallen from his face in an instant and was replaced with a scowl. "You know, I always knew you were a bitch. Didn't know you were a whore too."

Jane cocked her head to the side. "One with standards." She said. "My dad's at work right now. Get out of here before I call him on the payphone."

He stared at her for a moment longer before turning away from them and grumbling under his breath as he walked into one of the theatres.

Once Troy disappeared from sight Mike looked down at Jane, whose eyes were still fixed on the theatre doors for a few lingering moments. She blinked a few times before looking away and up at him. "You okay?" she asked.

"Am I okay?" he repeated. "What about you?"

Jane shrugged and started for the exit again. "I'm fine." She answered, stepping out into the parking lot. "It happens all the time."

The thought of Jane having to hear something so awful 'all the time' made the sick feeling in his stomach grow stronger. Just like the rest of his friends she didn't deserve the sort of torment Troy was so good at. Though it was clear Jane knew how to take care of herself he still hated that she had to at all.

"Did he really beat up Dylan Demarco?" Mike asked, somewhat shifting the conversation.

Two weeks earlier Dylan Demarco, a freshman boy with wealthy parents, had been beat up in an alleyway in town. He needed countless stitches and had a concussion. After being in the hospital for a week and a half he had just returned to school. The whole town was wondering who could do something so cruel to such a young boy. In hindsight Mike should have figured out it had been Troy. But it was one thing to go from tripping kids in the halls to sending someone to the hospital.

Jane nodded. "I was walking home after meeting up for lunch with Max and passed him and his friends beating him up. They didn't see me, and it was before things got really bad, so I just left." She bit down on her bottom lip. "I think I'll still tell my dad. But I'll call it in as an anonymous tip."

"You think that'll work?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, her eyes glancing at the doors where Troy had just disappeared out of. "Maybe." She said before looking over at him again. "Are you hungry? For, like, real food?"

After the movie they'd just seen he absolutely was not. But he wasn't ready to drive her home yet. "Yeah, food sounds good." He said.

Her smile once again returned to her face, one bright enough to make him almost forget about their interaction with Troy. "Benny's?" she asked.

"Definitely." He agreed.

They turned and headed for the doors before crossing the parking lot to get to his car and driving down to the opposite side of town. Mike

did his best to replace the gruesome images from the film with ones more pleasant. His mind, against his own will, decided that the look on Jane's face right before she kissed him was a good one to replace them with.

## 4. Meeting Madmax

please leave me suggestions on what to do with this story because I kind of have no idea!1!

---

The mid-October Indiana air was still thick with humidity that stuck to every inch of exposed skin. Every year that passed the whether got stranger and stranger. The AC was blasting in the small restaurant and washed over the two teens when they stepped inside. Even with the windows open in the car during the ride over they still managed to get a layer of sweat stuck to their foreheads. Mike glanced over at Jane just in time to watch her pull her sleeve over her hand and wipe off her face.

There were only a few occupied tables inside and they chose one in front of the windows. They both skimmed the menu despite the fact that they already knew what they were getting. The water brought over by the waitress was an extra relief from the heat outside. Once they both ordered and were left alone they looked at each other across the table, Jane being the first to speak up.

"I think I'll tell Max that I'll go with her to any movie she wants if she comes with me to Star Wars." She told him. "I might leave out the fact that it won't just be the two of us."

"What if she wants you to go see that scary movie again?" he asked in between sips of cold water.

Jane shrugged. "I don't know." She admitted. "Maybe it won't be as bad if I already know what's coming." She propped her elbows up on the tabletop. "I feel bad I made you come with me today. I didn't know it was going to be that scary."

"It's fine, really." He said quickly.

A grin forced its way onto her face despite how clearly she tried to hold it back. "You sure?" she asked. "I don't want you to have nightmares."

Mike scoffed at her. "I'm not a kid, I don't get nightmares anymore."

She raised an eyebrow at him, squeezing her straw between her thin fingers. "Everyone gets nightmares."

"Including you?"

"Yeah, of course."

Curiosity got the better of him. "What about?"

Jane fell silent as she thought, taking a sip of water and letting her eyes drift out the window. "Hm..." she hummed to herself. "Well I have this one recurring nightmare that I get, like, once a month. So I wake up in the middle of the school and I feel like I can't breathe. And everything is... different."

"Different."

"Cold and dark. Kind of like the whole world turned into a zombie." She propped her elbows up on her table and rubbed her hand over her mouth. Though talking about the dream clearly made him uncomfortable he was more curious about her than ever. "So I get up and start wandering around, and I'm looking for someone. I'm screaming their name as loud as I can, of course I never remember their name when I wake up, but I'm all by myself. I always wake up right when I realize that whoever I'm looking for isn't there."

Mike blinked at her a few times, speechless. "Wow." Was all he could say.

She grinned at him from across the table. "I think maybe I should take a break from the scary movies."

"That's probably a good idea."

Their food came shortly after and they fell into an easy and comfortable conversation about school. They talked about their classes, Jane in honors English and history and Mike in honors math and science. Jane made a joke about them being a homework dream team and suggested they study together sometime. In his head he heard both Nancy and his friends teasing him about everything

'study' could be a codeword for and hoped his face didn't flush. They exchanged stories about Troy but quickly moved on when they both started getting angry about everything the other person said.

Eleven's gaze moved to the view of the street out the window and an expression he couldn't identify quickly passed over her face before she turned back to him. "Hey, so, if Max does end up coming with us to the movie don't take anything she says too seriously."

"What do you mean?" he asked in between fries.

"Well, she's been teasing me nonstop ever since the party because she knows that we... you know."

Mike felt blood rush to his face at the speed of sound. "Oh."

"Yeah." She finished the last of her water and set it on the end of the table for it to be refilled the next time the waitress came around. "She's convinced that it's impossible for us to be friends after that."

"My friends have said pretty much the same thing." He admitted, leaving out the part that Nancy was the worst of them all.

Her lips turned up. "Really?" Mike nodded, a bit too embarrassed to say much. "It's kind of stupid, right? What do they know?"

"I guess we'll just have to show them."

"Good." She said before pointing a finger out the window. "Because Max just pulled up."

Mike followed her gaze just in time to see a familiar head of red hair climb out of the passenger's seat of a flashy car. His stomach did a nervous flip as she walked up to the front door of the restaurant, wondering if she would tease them just as bad as her friends did. She walked up to the counter and handed over a few bills before grabbing the to go bag next to her and the cashier. Max turned back to the door when her eyes landed on him and Jane and she quickly changed her direction.

"Hey guys." She said in a bright voice he could instantly tell was fake. "What are you up to."



"Eating." Jane said flatly. If he looked at her close enough he could see splotchy red marks in her cheeks, almost blush.

Max sat on the edge of the bench next to her and forced her way into the booth. "Well I can see that." She said. "But what's the occasion."

"No occasion." Jane replied, not looking directly at either of them. "We're just hanging out."

Unphased by how shut down her friend was Max turned her attention to him. "You guys fix your machine?" she asked.

"Yeah, a bit." He answered, wiping his now sweaty palms on his jeans. "She actually helped us out big time with a wire problem."

"Her looks are deceiving but she's actually a huge nerd."

"So I'm learning."

Max looked back over at Jane, who was suddenly very interested in the salt shaker. "You still coming with me to that new horror movie next week."

Jane perked up slightly, a small smile replacing a fairly miserable expression. "Yes." She said, "*If* you see whatever movie I want to go see."

Mike watched Max carefully as she thought over the offer. "See, now, I know exactly what movie you're going to make me see." She said. "Is the movie under two hours?"

"Yes." Jane answered even though Mike was pretty sure the movie was two hours and fifteen minutes exactly.

Max rolled her eyes. "Alright, fine, I'll go."

Jane's face lit up. "Thank you." She said, putting her hand on Max's arm and giving her a hard shove. "Now go away."

"Wow." Max said as she got to her feet, then looked at him. "Do you see how she talks to her best friend?"

"Go!"

Max quickly grabbed her to-go bag and turned for the door just as Jane started to get out of the booth. Once she was outside he saw Jane let out a sigh of relief and leaned against the back of the booth.

"She seems nice." Mike said with a hint of sarcasm.

A grin spread on her face as she picked her head back up and looked at him. "She is." Jane answered, "When she's not being a pain in the ass she's the best friend in the world."

Mike dunked one of his fries into the ketchup puddle on the side of his plate. "So was it your idea or hers to go to Jennifer's party?"

"Hers." Jane said. "She wanted to see if the guy she liked was going. She had this big plan to make a move on him but we got a little sidetracked."

"Oh yeah?" he asked, "Sidetracked with what?"

She rolled her eyes and threw her rolled up napkin at him. It bounced harmlessly off his shoulder and landed on the floor. "You know what." Jane said. "She spent the rest of the night trying to get me to talk to you so she wouldn't have to talk to the guy she liked."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "You were gonna talk to me?"

Jane shrugged. If he didn't know better he would have thought her cheeks turned pink. "I don't know, maybe." She said. "But I threw up in the backyard and had to go home so it doesn't really matter."

"Yes it *does* matter." Mike kicked her foot underneath the table. "What were you gonna say?"

She groaned, "I don't *know*." She whined. "Probably something really awkward and dumb. I was pretty drunk."

"Yeah, you were." He agreed before doing his best impression of drunk Jane. "That's why I made sure I was coherent." She burst out laughing and reached across the table push him, which only made him laugh harder. "You looked miserable when the bottle landed on

you."

"Not because of you." She assured him. "Just the whole idea of the game seemed kind of awkward. Plus the whole, you know, not having my first kiss thing."

"Sorry."

Her eyebrows met in the middle of her forehead. "Why are you sorry?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Kind of a crappy first kiss, if you ask me."

"Why?" she asked. "Because of the alcohol, the closet, or you?"

"Yes."

She rolled her eyes at him. "Shut up, Mike. It was *fine*. You're not a bad kisser. Besides, we might not have been friends if the bottle didn't land on me."

Mike felt his cheeks burning at her comment about him being a good kisser. If he had feelings for her it was the kind of comment that would turn him into a lovesick mess. Thankfully they were just friends. "That's true." He said, choosing to ignore the comment all together.

Once they finished eating they got back into Mike's car and decided to drive to a local ice cream shop. They sat next to one another on the hood of the car and watched the road in front of them. He was once again surprised by how easy spending time with Jane was. Like hanging out with a friend he had known all his life. The more they talked the more they realized how much they had in common.

"Why did you guys go to the party?" Jane asked as she bit into the cone of her ice cream.

Mike shrugged and scooped up another spoon. One thing they didn't have in common was her preference of a cone and his preference of a cup. "We've never been invited to a big party like that before. We figured we might as well go since we'd never get invited to another

one again."

"I heard Margret is throwing a Halloween party." Jane said. "I'll go if I go you go?"

"How'd you hear about it?" he asked, avoiding agreeing to go.

"From Margret. She sits in front of me in Chemistry. Said I could bring whoever I wanted." She bumped her shoulder against his. "So, you coming with me?"

He groaned quietly, unable to come up with an excuse to not go. "Yeah, alright."

Jane lit up. "Good." She said, taking another bite of her waffle cone. "We gotta start brainstorming costumes."

When Mike dropped her off at her house a little less than an hour later he spotted Chief Hopper sitting on the front porch. Mike could feel him watching them as Jane opened the car door and promised to see him at school the next day before jogging up the walkway. She waved at him once last time before he started the car back up and pulled away from the house. As he drove back to his house he sincerely hoped that Chief Hopper didn't know the specifics of how he and Jane had met.

## 5. Study Buddies

welcome back to another update! thank you those of you who left me suggestions with that to do with this story, I'll try to incorporate as much of your ideas as possible. in the mean time enjoy this story!

---

"This is impossible." Dustin declared before tossing his pencil down onto his notebook. "I'm giving up."

The party took up a table in the library after school while they all worked on homework together. It was only mid October and they were already swamped with work. It wasn't uncommon that they spent around 2 hours on homework a night. There was seriously something wrong with the Indiana public school system. Mike and Dustin were studying for the same Trigonometry test they had coming up on Monday while Lucas and Will were studying for an English test. It seemed that most of the school was pressed with a heavy workload by the way that almost every table in the library was taken up by stressed looking teens.

"Mike, help me out here." Lucas said, nudging his side to get his attention before pointing to a highlighted line on his paper. "Is this a metaphor or a simile?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "How the hell am I supposed to know? I failed last semester, remember?"

Will propped his elbows up on the table and hid his face in his hands. "Why don't we take a break?"

No one offered any protests. They all closed their notebooks and binders and let out a sigh of relief that, for a moment at least, they could let their brains rest. In the hour and a half that they'd been in the library Mike had developed a pounding headache. Not to mention the way his eyes burned from reading so many math problems.

"What are we gonna do for Halloween?" Lucas asked, breaking the silence after a few moments.

Mike hadn't brought up Jane's offer from almost a week back, waiting to see if someone else would come up with a better idea. Though going to a party wasn't the worst idea in the world he would have much preferred to spend the whole night with his friends in his basement watching Star Wars movies back to back until they all passed out. But when his three friends shrugged and remained silent Mike figured he should at least mention it. "Margret Wilson is throwing a Halloween party. She told Jane and Max that they could invite anyone they wanted. We can go there?"

He watched them exchange looks, silently debating the option. "You mean we might actually go to two parties in one month?" Will asked, sounding just as shocked as they all felt.

"Only if you guys wanna go."

"Why the hell not?" Lucas asked. "Might as well go if we have the option. Besides, Dustin needs another chance to shoot his shot with Margret."

Dustin nodded in agreement. "I think it would be best for her to be intoxicated when I try."

They all struggled to keep the volume down while they laughed. Mike spotted a few people at various tables nearby giving them dirty looks, which only made them laugh harder. After a few minutes they forced themselves to be quiet. They hunched back over their homework when they saw the librarian get up from her desk and start to come over.

Dustin glanced over his shoulder and watched her walk back and sit down. "So," he said once she turned back to her computer. "You and Jane, huh?"

Mike raised an eyebrow at him. "What about me and Jane?"

"You guys have hung out twice already." Will pointed out. "Plus you guys are going to see the movie this weekend."

"We're all going to see the movie this weekend." Mike pointed out.

Will continued as if he hadn't been interrupted. "And you guys are

always talking in the hallway and acting like a couple."

Mike scoffed. "We do *not* act like a couple."

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Oh please." He said before propping his chin on his hand and batting his eyes dramatically at Mike. "Hi Jane! How are you Jane! I'll walk with you to class Jane!" Mike kicked him under the table and felt his cheeks turn bright red as all his friends once again started laughing. "Seriously, can you guys just go at it this weekend already?"

"Shut *up*." Mike hissed. "Why is everyone so convinced that Jane and I are a thing? You guys are worse than Nancy."

"Well maybe if you guys would just get it over with then we wouldn't have to be so annoying about it." Dustin countered, lightly tapping his pencil on his open binder. "Seriously, you guys already kissed once and it went fine. What's holding you back?"

He sent his friend a half hearted glare. "We're friends now. The kiss at the party doesn't count because it was for a game and we were both drunk. Hypothetically even if I wanted to kiss her again, which I *don't*, it's not like she's interested anyway."

"Man you are so clueless." Lucas muttered to himself.

Before Mike could ask what he meant Will shushed them all and nodded towards the library doors. "Guess who just walked in."

He turned to look over his shoulder and instantly spotted Jane and Max surveying the room for a place for them to sit. Mike was just about to grab her attention when her eyes met his and a smile broke out on her face. She grabbed Max's arm and dragged her over to the table that they sat at. Though he could feel his friends gazes staring holes in his head he moved his books aside to make room for the two girls.

"Is it okay if we join you?" Jane asked, her voice hushed so the people around them wouldn't glare.

"Yeah of course." Mike answered for the rest of them.

They set their books down on the table before pulling over two empty chairs from a table nearby. They sat at the end of the table, Jane squeezed in between Mike and Max. She offered him a small smile and a quiet thanks before everyone opened their books back up and started working again.

Mike went back to working on his trigonometry homework and tried to keep his mind from wandering. Trig was his least favorite math subject to begin with. It didn't help that the conversation he'd just had with his friends was fresh in his mind. Didn't they realize that constantly bringing up the kiss between him and Jane made it harder to ignore? He spared a glance in her direction just in time to see her bite down on her lower lip, which only reminded him of the feeling of her lips on his once more. Blush rose to his cheeks and he forced his eyes back on the math problems in front of him.

The space at the head of the table wasn't nearly enough room and left Jane squished between Mike and Max. Her leg bounced up and down under the table as she worked, occasionally brushing against his own. Either she didn't notice or she chose to ignore it the way he did. When Mike finally finished his trig homework he spared a glance at the homework Jane was working on, which looked like an essay for English.

As he took out his American history homework he felt Jane poke his arm with her pencil. When he turned towards her she slid over the essay she'd been writing and whispered "does this make sense?"

Her essay was about *The Catcher in The Rye* and how Holden's character had developed throughout the novel. She explained that aside from the obvious change being his streak of adventurousness his suggested mental illness also developed and cited both his episode towards the end of the book and the ending itself to support her claim. Jane's writing was mature and she analyzed the book so well that he understood everything she said despite how he hadn't gotten through more than half of the book himself.

"It's really good." Mike said as he slid the paper back to her.

Though she didn't look too convinced. "I don't know." She said. "It's just... missing something." Jane frowned slightly before leaning over



and looking at his open homework. "What are you working on?"

He turned his paper so she could read it better. "The civil war." He told her. "Nothing exciting."

Jane scoffed at him. "Nothing exciting? The civil war is my favorite topic."

"Nerd."

She kicked him under the table before highlighting what had been on her AP American history class a week and a half before. It didn't come as much surprise that the AP class was ahead of the regents class. Jane suggested studying tips for him and even offered to give him her flash cards since she didn't need them anymore.

Slowly but surely people started leaving the library. Max left first, explaining that her brother would be mad if she made him wait too long. Lucas was supposed to do some work for the family next door at 5:30 so he made sure to leave early enough to give him some time at home first. Dustin declared that he was too burnt out to do anymore work before packing up. Will only left when his mom came to the school to pick him up, waving at him from the door to the library. He gave Mike a pointed look and nodded in Jane's direction when she wasn't looking.

"Does your family need you home at any specific time?" Jane asked once they were alone. Though they now had plenty of room neither of them moved apart from each other.

Mike shrugged. "No, not really." As long as he made it to the dinner table he doubted his parents would have noticed he was missing. "What about your dad?"

"He's working late. Again. I'm on my own tonight."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Does he work late a lot?" he asked, his curiosity getting the best of himself.

"Yeah, the station is a little understaffed so everyone is working overtime." Jane tapped her pencil against her chin. "It's fine, though. I have a lot of time to myself to do whatever I want."

"You should throw a party or something." Mike suggested.

She rolled her eyes. "Like anyone would want to come to a party at the Chiefs house."

Less than half an hour later they had finished all their homework and started packing up their things. Mike dragged his bike along next to him while he and Jane walked through Hawkins. As usual the conversation flowed naturally and easily. He often wondered how they had never interacted before the party when they'd been going to school together for almost three years. Especially when they had so much in common. Mike tried to think about a time when their paths had crossed before, a class they had in common or a shared lunch period, but his mind came up empty.

"I told them about Margret's party." He said as they got closer to her neighborhood. "We usually just have a movie marathon so it might be a nice change."

"Max and I didn't really do anything fun last year so I feel like we have to make up for it this year." She looked over at him. "Do you know what you're gonna be?"

Mike shook his head. "No clue yet."

"We should plan a costume together." She said, "Like Danny and Sandy from *Grease* or Carrie White and Tommy Ross."

He made a face at her. "Carrie kills Tommy. Are you trying to tell me something."

"Technically Tommy dies because the bucket that spilled the pigs blood hit him in the head." Jane pointed out. "But I suppose we can stick to characters that are both alive."

Mike laughed, "Guess that means I shouldn't suggest Romeo and Juliet."

"You read my mind, I was going to suggest Hamlet and Ophelia next."

They continued coming up with fake ideas for costumes until they reached her house. Though Mike wasn't sure if she genuinely wanted

to do a couples costume (key word being *couples*) he enjoyed the back and forth jokes and suggestions. They came up with a few more serious suggestions (Andrew and Allison from *The Breakfast Club*, JD and Veronica from *Heathers*, and Brad and Janet from *Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and both promised to think of more before they went to see the movie on Saturday. By the time they reached her house Jane had started to write a list of costume ideas on an index card.

She stood on the curb in front of her house while Mike held onto his bike. "See you tomorrow?"

"Yup." He agreed. "I'm picking Will up, I can give you and Max a ride too if you want."

Jane grinned at him. "That's awesome. I'll call her and let her know tonight. We still on for sitting in the back?"

"Whether they like it or not, yeah."

Her smile widened and had the same effect on his own. "Cool. See you then." She turned and started up the walkway while Mike adjusted his backpack and got on his bike. Just as he was about to start peddling he heard her voice. "Mike?" When he looked up he saw her halfway up to her house, her hands wrapped around the straps of her backpack while she bit down on her bottom lip.

"Yeah?"

"Um..." A shallow crease settled on her forehead as her eyebrows came together. "Thanks for helping me with my essay today."

He shrugged his shoulders, "Yeah, of course."

Jane nodded a few times, her hair falling down in her eyes. "Okay, bye."

She turned and jogged up to her front door, pulling her keys out of her pocket before taking the small steps two at a time. Mike wondered only for a fleeting moment what she had really been about to say before brushing it off and riding away from her house. He spent the rest of his ride home brainstorming more Halloween costume ideas and decided that Jane had come up with all the good

ones.

## 6. Luke and Leia

back again with another chapter! thank you so much everyone who has reviewed and kept up with this story! I hope you guys are liking it so far

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Saturday morning Mike sat around his house and waited anxiously for 2 pm, when he was supposed to pick up Jane. As well as Will and Max. Since he had no homework to occupy his time he alternated between watching TV and reading comic books, not having the attention span to focus on one for two long. When he came back upstairs after attempting to watch TV for the fifth time Nancy poked her head out of her bedroom door, still dressed in her pajamas and a pair of headphones around her neck.

"What are you *doing*?" she asked as he came up from down the hall.

"I'm *bored*." He replied in the same exasperated tone she had used. "A have a whole hour left before we're supposed to be going to the movies and I don't know what to do with myself."

Nancy leaned against the doorframe, crossing her arms across her chest. "I guess that means you wanna borrow my car?" Mike nodded. "Who are you going with, by the way."

"Will, Dustin, and Lucas. And Max and Jane."

He regretted mentioning her name as soon as he saw Nancy's face light up. "Oh so it's a date?"

"Did you not hear me say four other peoples names?"

"Yeah but *her* name is the one that matters." She pushed off the wall and turned back into her room. "Get your ass in here, kid."

"Why?" he asked, following her only until he got to the door.

"Because if you want to borrow my car you're going to talk to me." Mike only groaned as he stepped inside her room and sat at her desk. "You make a move yet?"

He rolled his eyes at her. "No. And I'm not going to make a move on her because she's my friend."

"Mike cut it out already!" she said, grabbing a pillow and throwing it at him. He quickly batted it away and it landed harmlessly on the floor. "You obviously have some feelings for her that you're trying to ignore."

"I think you're making that up."

Nancy gave him a pointed look before getting up from her bed before crossing the room to the bookshelf next to her desk. She pulled out the yearbook from her senior year, when Mike had been a sophomore. "Let's see what this girl looks like, anyway." She mumbled to herself as she opened the book and started flipping through the pages. Mike had no idea what Jane looked like the year before since he'd never noticed her before and he hadn't seen her yearbook picture yet. He could only imagine what she looked like when Nancy's jaw dropped open. "Oh my god, she's so cute."

She handed him the yearbook and Mike quickly found Jane's picture. Her hair was long enough to be out of the shot but was just as curly. She still had the same baby face and rosy cheeks, but she had on a closed mouth smile. Which was really a shame since her opened mouth toothy grin was even cuter. "Her hair is a lot shorter now." Mike commented as he handed the book back.

"You're smiling like an idiot and your face is bright red." Nancy pointed out as she set the yearbook back on the shelf. He quickly straightened out his expression but it only made her laugh. "Come on, just admit it!"

"No!"

She punched his arm lightly. "Why not?"

He swatted her hand away and pushed her office chair back so she couldn't reach him anymore. "Because I'm waiting to get over it, alright!" he shot back. "We're just friends and I'm trying to get rid of all these stupid leftover feelings, but everyone keeps bringing it up all the time and makes it impossible to ignore."

Nancy's face turned sympathetic and he quickly looked away. "But do you wanna be just friends?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders, his eyes fixed on one of her many notebooks for college. "I'd rather be just friends than make a move on her and have her not even want to be my friend."

"But what if she wants something more too?" She quickly countered.

"I don't know if you noticed," Mike said, forcing himself to look at her, "but I'm not exactly a risk taker."

Nancy hummed quietly as she walked over to her bed and sat down on the edge, crossing her legs underneath her. "On a scale of 1 to 10 how convinced are you that she might feel the same way?"

"I don't know," Mike said, "maybe... a 2?"

"Okay, why?"

He let out a sigh and sank down in the chair slightly. He was terrified of reading into her actions too much and convincing himself that she might feel some way about him when in reality it was the opposite. That was the type of things that ruined friendship, and he and Jane were on the fast track to becoming great friends. But he could tell by the look on his sisters face that she wasn't going to let him get away with not answering.

"She held my hand during a movie." He told her, "But that was only because she was scared."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "How long did she hold your hand for?"

"Like half the movie?"

"Mike, I'm gonna tell you something as someone who pulled the 'hold my hand because this movie is scary' thing." Nancy said, using air quotes with her fingers. "If a girl holds your hand in a movie for more than two minutes than she's not just doing it because she's scared."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "And why is that?"

"If she was really scared than she would have stopped as soon as the scene ended and she calmed down. And then afterwards she would have said something like 'sorry if that was weird I was really freaked out'. So you should already bump the 2 up to a 4." Mike rolled his eyes at her. "Why else?"

"She said we should have matching Halloween costumes." He told her. "Like Sandy and Danny from *Grease* and Hamlet and Ophelia."

A wide grin spread on her face. "Those are both couples, you know?"

"Yeah, I know."

"Tell me about when you met her at the party again."

Mike sighed and crossed his arms across his stomach, already feeling his cheeks go warm again. "Well we were in the basement and this girl said we should play spin the bottle. I only stayed because I knew Dustin had a crush on her. When it was my turn the bottle landed on Jane."

"And?"

"And we went in the closet and talked for a little while." Mike shifted in his seat, discomfort making his skin crawl. He never imagined he'd go into so much detail about girls with his sister before. "Then she told me that she'd never kissed anyone before. And then she did it."

"What was it like?"

Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "Why? You never kiss anyone before?"

Nancy stretched her leg out and kicked him. "No, idiot. Did you feel something with her?"

"I mean yeah."

"Did she?"

Mike shrugged yet again. "How am I supposed to know?"

"Well did she say something afterwards?"



"No."

Nancy groaned and dramatically flopped down on her back. "You're killing me Mike!" she shouted. "Talking to you is like talking to a brick wall sometimes, you know?" She propped herself back up on her elbows so she could look at him. "Are you guys seeing a scary movie today?"

"Star Wars isn't scary."

"So if she holds your hand again you'll have no excuse to not make a move."

He rolled his eyes and got to his feet, grabbing her car keys off her desk. "That's my cue to leave." Mike said before heading into his room across the hall to get his jacket and shoes. As he got ready he could hear Nancy calling after him that he had better tell her every last detail about his day with Jane.

The ride to the Hopper house was even shorter by car. Before he knew it he was sitting in front of her house and playing over his conversation with Nancy. Why couldn't she and his friends understand that he was fine with them being friends? Was it such a wild concept? Jane had even hinted that Max teased her in the same way. He couldn't help but wonder if they had similar conversations. His mind then wandered into dangerous territory as he speculated what she would say when he came up in conversation.

He quickly forced the thought out of his mind when she emerged from the front door and hurried over to his car with a bright smile. She had opted for light wash jeans and a grey t-shirt instead of the usual black on black. Though his heart skipped a beat at how cute she looked he didn't let his mind linger on it for long.

She dropped into the seat next to him and started digging in her pocket as he started the car back up. "I came up with more costume ideas."

Jane read him her list of ideas as she gave him directions to Max's house. Some of them were funnier to think about but they both knew were just jokes (John Lennon and Paul McCartney and Hall & Oats)

while others made him hope she didn't see him blush (Benjamin Braddock and Mrs. Robinson from *The Graduate*). She crossed ideas off as she went through the list in an attempt at narrowing it down.

She put the list away when they pulled up in front of Max's house and spent the whole ride to Will's convincing her that the movie was going to be good and that she would like it. Max reminded her more than once that Jane owed her and that she wasn't going to let her get away with not seeing *Pet Cemetery*. When they pulled up to Will's house Mike could feel his eyes staring holes into his head when Will noticed Jane in the passengers seat.

Dustin and Lucas were already at the theatre when they got there. As they bought their tickets Jane ignored the glares sent her way from Max. Once their tickets and snacks were bought they started heading to the theater. Just as Dustin opened the door he glanced back at the rest of them. "Front row, right?"

"No way." Jane said almost immediately. "I don't feel like getting a neck cramp."

Max turned towards her friend. "If you're making me see a Star Wars movie I'm gonna sit where I want."

"Fine. You losers can sit in the front and I'll get the best seat in the house in the back row." She glanced over at Mike. "Are you still sitting with me?"

His friends gazes were like lasers staring holes into the left side of his body. He kept his eyes fixed on Jane, knowing that if he dared to look at them his face would turn bright red. "Yeah, sure."

They separated from the group and got seats in the empty back row, Mike imagining what his friends would say as soon as they were out of ear shot. But the future teasing was well worth it if he got to sit where he wanted. While they waited for the lights to dim they discussed the best parts of the previous Star Wars movie and talked about their favorite characters. It didn't come as a shock that Jane's was Princess Leia. He managed to catch a glimpse at the ear to ear grin that spread on her face as the opening credits started rolling.

Mike could tell within the first 45 minutes that it could quite possibly be his favorite movie ever. It also helped that, thanks to the view from the back row, he was able to see the whole screen. He could feel a matching level of excitement buzzing off of Jane next to him. A little more than halfway through the movie he felt her hand land on top of his before she leaned towards him and whispered in his ear "Remind me to add Luke and Leia to the list when we get out."

Normally Mike wasn't the biggest fan of talking during movies. But he didn't exactly mind the way that her warm breath tickled the back of his neck. "Noted." He whispered back. Mike could feel her move away from him again and waited for her hand to leave his. 30 seconds went by, then a minute, then three.

Shortly after Nancy's words started playing in his head on repeat Luke and Leia began to kiss.

The second half of the movie was, admittedly, a blur. It was hard to focus on anything else than the feeling of Jane's hand wrapped around his. Every time she shifted in her seat her hand moved and only reminded him that she was still touching him. As the climax of the movie approached and things got more intense her grip on him started to tighten.

When the lights finally came on after 2 hours and 7 minutes Jane let out a long sigh before turning in her seat to face him. He pretended to be just as unaware of their still joined hands as she was. "That was *really* good."

"Yeah definitely." He agreed. The parts he remembered had been fantastic.

Jane pulled her hand away from his just to reach into her pocket and pull out the list and a pen. She leaned on the armrest in between them as she added another pair to their ideas. "I don't know if I can do Leia because I have no idea how to do my hair like that. I might have to go to a hairdresser."

"Is there anyone you know that can do it?"

She glanced up at him and shook her head. "The only girl I really

know is Max and she'd have no clue. Jane folded the paper back up and put it in her pocket again. "Unless you wanna do it for me."

He laughed at the idea of knowing how to do anything with hair other than brush it. "I think I'll pass."

They met their friends in the lobby and took their time heading back to the cars as they talked about the movie. Max admitted that it wasn't as bad as she has anticipated it to be. Though most of the movie was blurry Mike managed to participate enough in the conversation that no one noticed. As they split up into the two cars the conversation continued, Jane rubbing it in to Max that she knew she would like the movie and that she should be more open to trying new things.

Will was dropped off first since he lived closest to the theatre. From there Max gave him directions to her house. Before getting out of the car she reminded Jane that they were still going to see *Pet Cemetery* in the upcoming days, which Jane didn't look too thrilled about. She turned in her seat to face him as he started driving towards her neighborhood.

"That was a much better movie than the last one we saw." She said, her elbow rested on the console between them.

"Yeah, definitely." Mike agreed. "A lot less blood."

"We should all have a movie marathon for Halloween." Jane suggested. "After the party we can all sleep over at someone's house and just watch movies until we pass out."

"We can probably do my house." Mike said before really thinking about his offer. Would he be able to survive a night with both Nancy and his friends teasing her about Jane? But the way her face lit up when he offered made him decide to suck it up. "There's a lot of room in the basement so we'll all fit."

"That's awesome." She said as he pulled into her neighborhood. "I can come over before the party and help you set up if you want."

Mike quickly waved her off. "It's fine, you don't have to."

She pushed his arm lightly and he could see her roll her eyes out of the corner of his eye. "Don't be silly. Just let me know what time to come over."

"Alright, fine."

When he pulled the car to a stop in front of her house he noticed the truck in the driveway and the open front door. Jane unbuckled her seatbelt but she didn't move to get out right away. Instead she turned her head towards him again. He struggled to read her expression before she spoke. "You're the best, Mike."

It was then his turn to roll his eyes at her. "Yeah, okay."

"No seriously." She said, punching his arm lightly. "You're a really good friend. Walking me home after we only met once, going to see the movie with me. You're a really nice guy."

Unsure how to reply Mike simply shrugged his shoulders. "It's no big deal." He mumbled.

Whether it was his demeanor or red face that made her laugh. "Whatever." She said, yanking the car door open and getting out. "See you on Monday."

Mike waited until she was inside before driving back to his house. The skin on his hand was still buzzing from when she had touched him for a whole hour straight. When he got to his house he went straight to his room so he wouldn't have to face Nancy and try and rationalize why Jane had held his hand. As he laid on his bed he let himself, just for a moment, consider that maybe his sister was right. Though he would never dare to tell her so.

## 7. Science Fiction

sorry for the short wait! a few of you know that when I write a story it's 100% improvising and I have no idea where I'm going to take it. I got to a point in this story and *What Was Once Broken* where I was really stuck with what to do so I took some time to actually plan a story out for once. I hope you guys like this chapter!

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Halloween snuck up on the town of Hawkins before anyone expected it. The Wheeler's weren't the only ones rushing to get front lawn decorations in the days before. Nancy made plans with some of her friends from the college she commuted to when she found out that the house would be occupied with Mike's friends. Which he was thankful for since she wouldn't be breathing down his neck and teasing him about Jane all night. He was even more excited for Halloween than usual.

Halloween landed on a Saturday that year, to everyone's joy. On Wednesday Jane and Mike agreed on going as Brad and Janet and they went to the local mall to buy their costumes together. Seeing her ditch her black jeans and combat boots for a pink dress and white sweater was a huge shock to the system. Though it made her look cute it was very obviously not *her*.

Their plans were for Jane to come to his house at 3 to help him set up the basement. They were picking Max up at 5:30 and meeting Dustin, Lucas, and Will at Margret's house shortly after. Mike had no clue how long they would stay at the party but once they decided to leave they would avoid his parents and sneak into the basement and have a horror movie marathon. Since they all intended on getting just a bit too drunk to face their families they would all pack an overnight bag to leave in the car.

Despite how late Jane was coming over Mike was up at 10 am. By noon he knew he couldn't stand to be in the house any longer and asked Nancy to take him to the grocery store to buy snacks for later that night. She agreed, saying she had been planning on bringing something to the party she was going to.

"Are you excited for tonight?" she asked once they were out on the road.

It was a simple question but he could feel the double meaning hidden in her words. "Yeah, it's gonna be fun."

"Remember not to drink too much." She told him. "You don't wanna get sloppy around Jane."

Mike didn't even bother thinking of a comeback. She was definitely right. "Yeah, I know." He said instead.

"What are you guys going as again?"

"Brad and Janet from *Rocky Horror*."

Nancy snickered to herself. "That's adorable." She ignored Mike's annoyed groans. "You gonna buy her an engagement ring? For the costume of course."

He rolled his eyes despite the fact that she wasn't looking at him. "No." Mike glanced over at her. "Why? Should I have?"

She shrugged, "I don't know." Nancy said, "You can always grab one from my room if you need to."

They got to the grocery store and started filling up the cart with bags of chips and soda bottles. Mike scolded himself for not asking Jane and Max ahead of time what kind of snacks he liked. After years of friendship he knew what to pick out for every single one of the guys (Nilla Wafers for Dustin, pretzels for Lucas, Cheese Its for Will, and popcorn for all of them). Nancy helped him pick out a few extra snacks before they went to check out and she offered to split the bill 50/50.

The rest of the day went by painfully slow. He had purposely left homework to do so that he would actually have something to pass the time. It took longer than usual for him to get his work done since, thanks to his anticipation, he was having such a hard time focusing. Before he knew it there was only 10 minutes left until 3 pm and he'd only finished two classes of homework. At the sound of the doorbell Mike sprang out of his chair and sprinted down the hall. When he

reached the bottom of the stairs his stomach sank at the sight of Nancy and Jane talked in the foyer.

"Yeah he's mentioned you before." Nancy said as he stepped into earshot. "It's nice to finally meet you."

"It's really nice to meet you too." Jane replied, wearing a politer version of her usual smile. When her eyes fell on Mike at the bottom of the stairs her smile grew just enough to be noticeable. "Hey."

"Hey." Mike walked over and grabbed her arm, quickly pulling her down the hall and away from Nancy. "I'll show you the basement."

Butterflies started sprouting up in his stomach as they went down the slightly creaky staircase to the basement. Being alone with Jane as they walked home or in the movie theatre was one thing. But something about being alone in his house behind a closed door made him feel antsy. He felt self conscious of the state of the room while he watched her eyes take everything in. She set her overnight bag down on the couch before noticing the bookshelf full of movies and wandering over to it.

"*Woah.*" She said, her fingers running across the movie titles. "Mike, this is a serious collection."

He moved to stand next to her. "Last summer my friends and I organized it by category." He said before pointing at each shelf. "Action, comedy, horror, Nancy's romance movies, and thrillers."

"So the categories as well as the titles as in alphabetical order." She noticed, standing on her toes to get a better view of the higher shelves. "This is really cool."

Mike shrugged, not thinking much of the collection. It wasn't nearly the size he wished it was. "It's alright." He said simply.

Jane turned back to face the rest of the room. "How do you wanna set things up?" she asked.

In addition to the couch and two recliners already down in the basement Mike had brought down two air mattresses that were folded up next to the stairs. "I'm thinking we should move the table



out of the way and put the snacks on there and put the chairs under the staircase. We can unroll the air mattresses to make sure that there's enough room for them but we can blow them up later tonight."

Jane nodded a few times, her eyes darting across the room. "Wait." She said, "There's only five places to sleep and there's six of us."

"I'll just sleep in a sleeping bag."

"Mike, no-"

But he cut her off before she could protest any further. "It's fine, seriously. If it ends up bothering me I'll just go up to my room."

Although she looked like she wanted to argue more she stayed silent as she dropped her backpack down on the couch and helped him to move around the furniture. Either the table and recliners were a lot lighter than he remembered them to be or Jane was stronger than she looked. Everything was put into place easily and they then started bringing down the snacks Mike had bought earlier and putting everything into large serving bowls. He caught a glimpse of Jane sneaking a pretzel or two and pretended like he didn't notice. Once everything was set up Mike went upstairs to get changed while Jane dug in her backpack for her costume.

Just as he was pulling his tan jacket over his head he heard a soft knock on his bedroom door. Only moments later it cracked open and Nancy poked her head in. "You look like the biggest nerd ever."

"So I don't look any different?" he joked as he grabbed the glasses he'd bought and popped the lenses out of. "What time are you going out?"

"Soon." Nancy opened the door all the way so he was able to see her Lydia from *Beetlejuice* costume. "So that's Jane, huh?"

"Yeah."

"You're so clueless sometimes, you know?" she said, coming over and messing up his hair. "I mean did you see the way she looked at you when you came downstairs?" Nancy put on a goofy grin and batted

her eyes dramatically the same way Lucas had when he'd made fun of him. "Hi Mike." She said in a falsely dreamy voice.

He rolled his eyes at her. "I let you tease me as much as you want but I'm laying down the law now because she's in the house." Mike said. "So *please* don't be weird while she's here."

She sighed and turned back towards the door. "Okay, okay, *fine*. Let me know how it went when everyone goes home tomorrow."

As usual Mike agree but knew that he wouldn't give up every single detail.

He made his way back downstairs, lingering at the top of the basement stairs. "Are you dressed?" he called down, not wanting to catch her off guard.

"Yep!" she called back up.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs he spotted her in the bathroom with a flat iron in her hand. Half of her curls had been straightened out looking more like waves while the other half that had been untouched. Mike could see her focused expression in the reflection of the mirror when he stood behind her. Her tongue stuck out between her lips as she maneuvered her hands to avoid getting burned.

Jane's eyes met his in the mirror and she smiled at him. "Why do you look the same?" she asked. Instead of responding Mike took his fake glasses out of his pocket and slipped them onto his nose. "Okay, much better." She said, separating another strand of hair. "Your hair isn't messy enough though. I have some hair gel in my backpack you can use."

Mike went over to the couch, unzipping her bag and opening it up. The first thing he noticed inside was a polaroid camera that he took out so he would be able to find the gel better. After digging through her things long enough that he started to feel guilty he pulled the small bottle out and went back to the bathroom and stood next to her in the mirror. "What's the camera for?" he asked her as he opened the bottle.

"My dad's surprisingly sentimental." She told him, "He wanted me to take a picture of our costumes for him."

"You're right." He agreed, "That is surprising."

Jane shrugged her shoulders. They stood close enough to each other that her arm brushed against his. "It would make sense if you knew more about him."

"So why don't you tell me?"

She turned her head to look at him. "I don't wanna be a buzzkill."

"Tell me."

Jane let out a sigh and quickly finished the last few strands of curly hair. Once she was done she shut the iron off and turned towards him fully, grabbing the gel bottle from him. "Fine. But I'm doing your hair, it's not messy enough." She squeezed some bright blue gel into her hand and stood on her toes to reach the top of his head. He had to put more effort into listening than usual since the feeling of her hands in his hair was simply euphoric.

"He used to be married. He and his ex-wife had a kid named Sarah. But she got really sick when she was young." She put her hand on his shoulder and pulled him down closer to her height. "They got a divorce like a year after she died. He moved to Chicago and worked as a police officer there. I was around the same age Sarah was when I met him."

"How'd you guys meet?"

"My mom was on drugs. Like every single one there was. Our neighbors called about a noise complaint and he and his partner came over and saw what was going on and arrested her. I pretty much attached myself to him for the next 12 hours. I had to go to foster care for a little bit before he got the paper work started and I could go live with him."

"Wow."

"We moved down here because my mom got out of jail and kept

trying to contact me. It was either move here or get a restraining order against her. Moving was easier."

"Jane that's crazy."

She pulled her hands away from him and ran them under the water to wash off the gel. "It is what it is." She said simply. "That's why he's always taking pictures. Or making me take them. He only has a handful of pictures of Sarah." Jane dried her hands off before turning back to him. "Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"All sympathetic." She explained, "It's really not a big deal. I was like 6 when this all happened, I've had a lot of time to deal with it."

"Yeah but I just found out." Mike replied.

Jane laughed before walking out of the bathroom, Mike close behind her. "Alright, well get over it soon. We have to leave in a little bit." She picked the camera up from the couch. "Get over here."

Despite how much Mike hated getting his picture taken he willingly went to her side. Everything she told him was spiraling in his mind like a hurricane. He hated to think of Jane going through something so horrible. But he could tell by how casually she had talked about it all that she truly had moved on. There were dozens of questions he wanted to ask her but he didn't want to dampen her mood. Especially when she looked so happy when she threw her arm around his neck and got the camera ready.

"I'll take two." She said, "One for my dad and one for me."

He dared to let his arm wrap around her waist. "So what you're saying is I don't get a picture?"

Jane grinned even wider as she held the camera up in front of their faces. "I guess I'll take three then."

Her smile was contagious as the flash went off and blinded them. In between shots she took the undeveloped film and placed it on the couch behind them before holding the camera back up. After all three

pictures were taken she held them all and waved them so they would develop faster.

"I hope I have enough film for the rest of the night." She said as the pictures got darker and darker. "Of course the ones where we're all drunk are only for me."

She handed him a picture after they were finished developing. Mike forced himself to not stare at the picture for too long. Something about the fact that he and Jane had been documented together made his whole body feel warm. He set the picture down on the table so he wouldn't lose it while she put her pictures into her backpack.

"You ready to go?" she asked him, tucking her now wavy hair behind her ears.

"Let's go."

They went upstairs so he could grab his keys off the key ring before heading out to his car. Jane turned the volume on the car radio high and sang softly along to the song as they drove to Max's house. The later it got the more excited he was.

## 8. Damn it Janet!

the highly anticipated party chapter is here! I hope you guys like it and that it lives up to your expectations :)

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The party was already in full swing when Mike, Jane, and Max walked up to Margret's house. They could hear the music from where they parked down the hall and started to hear people cheering inside as they walked up to the front door. The front lawn was already starting to accumulate empty cups and beer bottles. The front door was propped open and they squeezed their way inside and into the crowd. There was a sea of both familiar and unfamiliar faces dressed up in various costumes. Max, who was dressed as a devil in head to toe red, following closely behind them as they went into the kitchen to get something to drink.

While Mike eyed the bowl of bright red punch apprehensively Jane didn't hesitate to grab a cup and dunk it into the large bowl. She handed one of both Mike and Max before getting one for herself and being the first to take a sip. She flinched at the burn from the alcohol but only for a moment. It took all of Mike's self control to not cough his lungs out when he finally took a drink. Max, on the other hand, gulped it down and hardly blinked.

"I've been practicing." She said as she went for a refill and she noticed them staring at her.

They stayed in the kitchen for a little while before they set out on finding the rest of their group. In the living room Jane stood on a chair so she could see over the crowd but she didn't catch any sign of them so they moved on to the back yard, where most of the party was. There was a set of speakers on the back patio as well as a second punch bowl. A few kids had even jumped into the pool, most of them with their costumes still on. They weren't out there very long before a familiar voice came behind them.

"You guys came!" They turned to find a stumbling Margret with a wide grin coming towards them. He could tell from both her costume and her pink hair (which she may have actually dyed for the

occasion) that she was dressed as Cindi Lauper. When she reached them she threw her arms around Max and Jane. "I was hoping you'd show up."

"Thanks for inviting us." Jane said, trying to hide her amusement.

Margret waved her off. "Yeah, of course." She said. "Just promise if your dad gets called you'll put in a good word for me."

"If he catches me at a party I'm not sure he'll be happy enough with me to listen."

Margret laughed and dropped her arms off their shoulders. "You guys looking for your friends? They're downstairs." She turned back towards her house and gave them directions to the basement stairs. "Tell them to get up here and have some fun." She told them as they headed back for the doors.

Sure enough Will, Dustin, and Lucas were all sitting on a couch in the basement with cups in their hands. By the way Dustin was slumped over slightly and leaning against Lucas Mike figured that he was the most drunk out of them all.

When they got downstairs Jane grabbed his arm and yanked him to his feet. "We're not spending the whole party down here." She said to all three of them.

"We're not?" Dustin asked when he managed to steady himself.

Jane shook her head. "Nope, we're gonna have fun." She said. "Why don't you go talk to Margret or something? You like her right?" Dustin nodded his head. "So go tell her you like her Cindi Lauper costume or something."

He nodded once again as he headed for the stairs back up to the first floor. "You're right." He said, his words a little slurred. "You're right. Thanks Jane."

Will quickly followed after him, likely to make sure that Dustin didn't fall and crack his head open, and shortly after the rest went upstairs too. Back in the living room Jane finished her drink and dragged Max into the kitchen with her to get another one, leaving Mike and Lucas.

"Well aren't you two as cute as can be."

"Shut up." Mike mumbled, "Like I didn't just catch you checking Max out."

"That's different." Lucas said, hardly phased by being called out. "I'm not pretending to not be interested in her. We also didn't do a couple's costume." Mike gave him a light shove but it only made him laugh. "Who knows, you guys might get drunk enough to make out in the closet again."

"Not gonna happen."

An hour and three drinks later both Mike's body and mind felt fuzzy and light. Will had to stop him from jumping into the pool not once but twice. The group floated from room to room, letting loose in front of their peers for what felt like the first time ever. At least for one night they weren't separated by social class. The only difference in the crowd was the level of drunk everyone was. Mike knew he was drunker than he had thought when he grabbed Jane's hand and pulled her into the living room to dance when she said how much she loved a song that had come on.

It felt good to not think so much around Jane all the time. When someone came around with a camera and she kissed his cheek for the picture he didn't even bother reading into it. When she drank from his cup after she lost hers he didn't bat an eye. He hardly even registered the looks of their friends when they walked through the house with their arms linked. His mind had gone into autopilot and he wondered why he'd never tried to go to a party before.

The Halloween party was unlike any night he'd ever lived. Unlike the last party they went to he and his friends were right in the middle of things, not shying away from the crowd in fear of being teased like they were at school. Either the people who teased them were too drunk to recognize them or too drunk to care. Jane was sandwiched in between Max and Margret for about five songs in a row until she ran off down the hall and ducked into a bathroom.

Mike's mind managed to start working again and he slowly but surely made his way to the bathroom that Jane had disappeared into. He



knocked on the door a few times before pushing it open and poking his head inside. Jane was leaning over the sink with her eyes closed when he came in and closed the door behind him. It wasn't until it latched shut that she opened her eyes and looked at him. "You okay?" he asked.

She nodded, tucking her hair that had started to curl again behind her ears. "I threw up a little." She told him. "But I'm okay now." Jane dumped the rest of her drink down the sink and filled it back up with water to wash her mouth out. "You having fun?" she asked once she spit the water back out.

"Yeah." Mike said, leaning on the sink next to her. "You?"

"Yeah. But I think I need some air." She wiped her mouth on her sleeve and turned towards him. "You wanna come with me?"

"Sure."

She slipped her fingers through his as they left the bathroom and weaved through the crowd to go out the front door. The lawn was even more littered than it had been when they got there so they sat down on the curb. The mid autumn weather nipped at their skin but the alcohol in their systems softened the feeling. Though they could still hear the music loud and clear it didn't shake their bodies the same way it had when they were inside. Despite the fact that there was a lot of room for them to sit Jane was right by his side, her arm touching his.

Despite the chaotic party behind them the empty street felt peaceful. If Mike tilted his head back and squinted he would have been able to make out a few stars. Something about Halloween was very different from every other night of the year. And sitting next to Jane was different from every other Halloween before it.

Jane stretched her legs out in front of her and put her hands in her lap. "What are you thinking about?" she asked suddenly, breaking the comfortable silence between them.

Mike shrugged. "I don't know." He admitted, "It's really nice out, I guess."

"Yeah." She agreed simply.

He looked over at her, studying her profile as she watched the color changing lights on the house across the street. For once he wasn't worried about her catching him staring. "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm just really happy." She said.

Mike waited for her to elaborate but she didn't and they were once again silent. Minutes went by but he didn't bother keeping track of them. At some point Jane rested her head on his shoulder. They had a long night ahead of them, still hours left of the party before their movie marathon back at his house, yet he felt as if he could sit there on the curb with her all night. Eventually his arm wrapped around her waist on its own accord but he didn't try to stop it. He could tell by the constant teasing that they had a strange sort of friendship. One he never expected to have before. But something about having Jane in his life felt right. They had an incredible connection that felt like something rare.

It occurred to Mike that the alcohol in his system was making him way too sentimental so he decided to stop thinking and listening to the music.

More time passed and suddenly Jane was sighing and moving to stand up. "We should probably go back." She said once she was up, holding out one of her hands to help him up. "You know what they'd say if we were gone too long."

"Yeah." He agreed, taking her hand and letting her pull him too his feet. His earlier suspicions that she was stronger than she looked were confirmed. Though once he was standing Jane didn't let go of his hand. He knew he should have said something but he couldn't think of anything. Mike eventually blurted the first thing that came to mind. "Hey Janet?" he said, quoting the movie they were dressed from.

"Yes Brad?" she replied, playing along.

"I've got something to say."

"Uh huh."

Mike was too drunk to say what the next line was ("I really love the skillful way you beat the other girls to the brides' bouquet" followed by breaking out into song). He could hardly even think the whole sentence, let alone say it. Instead he did what he'd been trying to hard not to think about doing for two and a half weeks.

He leaned down to her height and pressed his lips against hers. He intended only to give her a quick peck before hurrying back into the party and pretending like nothing happened, but her arms wrapped around his neck before he got the chance to pull away. Before he knew it his arms were around her waist keeping her close to him and their lips were moving against one another. Just like the first time they had kissed every hair on his body stood up.

Mike was far too intoxicated to really focus on anything other than the feeling of Jane's lips against his. It wasn't until she was leaning against the hood of a nearby car that he knew they'd even moved. Jane's hands traveled across the upper half of his body and left goosebumps in her path. Sounds escaped her lips that were more beautiful than any song he'd ever heard. He knew if he let himself he could fall totally and completely in love with Jane Hopper. The kind of love people didn't recover from when it was over. The kind of fall that could break someone.

But he didn't plan on making the fall. And he was glad he didn't when she was the one to pull away from the kiss first.

With his hand still on the back of her neck he could feel her clearing her throat on his palm. "We should probably go back now."

"Yeah." He agreed, reluctantly distancing the space between them. His hands dropped back to his sides only when hers did first.

"Sorry." She said quietly. Her eyes moved away from his to look at something on the lawn behind him.

Mike shook his head. "Don't be sorry." *Do it again.*

She offered him a small smile that didn't seem as genuine as her

usual ones. As they walked back up to the house they were quiet again. Only the silence was different. Thicker somehow. Jane's hands fiddled in front of her and her head was tilted down. But once they walked through the front door and re entered the party it was like a flip in her was switched. She was dancing her way through the crowd to get to their friends and she was all of a sudden back to normal. Mike on the other hand headed straight for the kitchen to get another drink.

About an hour later Mike was sitting outside and watching the people who were carefree enough to jump into the pool. The drunker her got the less dancing he did, not having enough confidence in his coordination to not fall over or break something. So he sat in a lawn chair with his fake glasses hanging from the collar of his shirt and his abandoned cup sitting at his feet. He'd been sitting there for twenty minutes when Will came out onto the lawn and came over to sit next to him.

"You look really drunk." Will commented once he was sitting next to him.

"I am really drunk."

He heard his friend snicker to himself. "Good thing Max and I stayed sober enough to drive you idiots home." Will said, then leaned over and nudged his arm. "You having fun Brad?"

Mike grinned and put his fake glasses on. "Yeah." He looked away from the kids splashing and screaming in the pool to look at Will. "I have to tell you something."

"Oh no."

He rolled his eyes. "But I won't tell you unless you promise not to tell the others."

Will nodded, "Yeah, okay. What is it?"

Mike looked back out at the pool, swallowing his nerves. Even admitting what had happened felt dangerous. Like he was teetering towards the edge of making the fall. "I kissed Jane."

Out of her corner of his eye he saw Will choke on the sip he had just taken. He quickly set his cup down and coughed a few times before turning towards him with a shocked expression. "You what? What happened?"

"She got sick so we went outside so she could get some air." He said. His stomach flipped and flopped at the mere memory of kissing her. "We went to go inside and I don't know, I just did it."

"And?"

"And what?"

Will once again nudged him. "Well did she kiss you back? Did she say something? Are you guys a thing now? What?"

"No, she just stood there like a limp fish." Mike said sarcastically. Though the thought of Jane quite literally being a limp fish made him laugh. He could feel Will watching him so he quickly forced his laughter to die down. "We're not a thing. At least I don't think we are. Not last time I checked."

"Maybe you should consider asking her out." Will said. "You guys are obviously into each other. You should at least try to go on a date."

Since Will wasn't teasing him he actually considered what he said. Though he doubted he would be able to confront his feelings about Jane head on without alcohol in his system to make him so care free. He was far too afraid of her rejection. Even more he was afraid of risking their friendship because of a crush. Mike was confident that he would get over it eventually. It was just a matter of when.

It was 11:30 when Max and Will gathered up the group and decided it was time to go home. Despite getting sick earlier he could tell Jane had had a few more drinks. Max held onto her hand as they walked across the front lawn and to Mike's car down the street. He trailed a few steps behind, clear minded enough to walk on his own but not enough to keep up. When they reached his car about a block away Max held her hand out.

"Keys Wheeler." He dug through his pockets and put his keys in her

hand before turning towards the car. "Get in the back, I don't want you puking on me."

Although he was certain he wouldn't throw up he complied and got into the backseat. Just as he grabbed his seatbelt Jane collapsed next to him. She leaned to the side more and more until she gave up on trying to stay upright and laid down with her head in his lap and her hand over her eyes.

Mike tapped her arm lightly. "You okay?"

She peeked through two of her fingers so she could look at him. "I'm scared I'll get car sick."

He reached for her hand and forced her two fingers together so she couldn't see anymore. "Please don't throw up in my car." he said.

"I won't."

Mike gave Max directions to his house in relation to Jane's as best he could. She eventually told him she'd figure it out and that he should just try and stay awake. He leaned his forehead against the cold window and ran his hands through Jane's hair absent mindedly. Her once wavy hair was much curlier than it had been when they got to the party and he thought to himself that he liked it better curly. It fit her better. With her hand over her eyes he didn't have to worry about her catching him looking at her. She was dangerously beautiful.

When they pulled into his neighborhood, Will driving Lucas' car behind them, he leaned down towards her. "You awake?" he whispered.

"Yeah." She whispered back.

Her breath tickled his face in the same way it had during the movie and sent a wave of goosebumps over his body. "We're almost there."

She put her hand on his shoulder and used it to pull herself upright again. Jane leaned her head back against the seat, her side pressed tightly against his. "I drank too much." She mumbled.

"You don't say." Max replied from the driver's seat.

Max pulled the car into the driveway and helped Mike pull Jane from the backseat. She insisted that she was fine to walk across the lawn to the door to the basement. Will had parked the car on the side of the street by the time Mike had taken the keys from Max and began to use all his focus to unlock the door. While Max looked around, having never been there before, Jane headed straight over to her backpack while she mumbled about needing to change her clothes.

"Nerd alert." Max said to herself when she spotted the put away D&D game.

Lucas, followed my Will and Dustin, had walked in just in time to hear her comment. "Maybe if you tried it you wouldn't think it was so nerdy." He told her.

She raised a red eyebrow at him. "You offering for me to join you? No way."

"You don't know what you're missing." Dustin declared as he sat down in the recliner.

The bathroom door cracked open just enough for Jane to poke her head out. "Max I need help!" she shouted out into the room. "I'm stuck in my dress."

Max shook her head and turned to head towards the bathroom. Just as she passed him Mike heard her mutter to herself "Why don't you ask Wheeler to help you?" He couldn't tell if she said it purposely for him to hear or not. She disappeared into the bathroom with Jane and shut the door behind her.

Before heading upstairs to change out of his own costume he told his friends to start picking out movies for them to watch. Traveling through his house quietly as to not get his parents attention was much more difficult than usual. He gripped on the railing up the stairs tightly with both hands and kept his eyes focused on every step. Thankfully he saw the light in his parents room off so he assumed they were asleep.

As he made it to his room and pulled out a change of clothes the feeling of Jane's lips on his was like a ghost tickling his face. He

hoped he would be able to pull it together and act normally around her when he finally sobered up.



## 9. Dream a Little Dream of Me

I'm glad to see you guys liked that last chapter! I have a feeling you guys will like this one just as much :)

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Once everyone was changed out of their costumes they all picked out a movie from the bookshelf. Max and Jane claimed the air mattresses, Dustin and Lucas the recliners, and Will shared the couch with Mike until it was time to go to sleep when he would move to the floor. The first movie they put on was *Halloween*, chosen by Max. She hardly flinched and even laughed a few times when everyone else got scared.

By the time they started the third movie it was already 3 AM. Mike could see Will starting to nod off when Dustin put *the Exorcist* into the VHS player so he moved to sit on his sleeping bag. Though the space between the bottom of the stairs and Jane's air mattress was small he didn't mind. He hardly moved once he fell asleep anyway. Mike couldn't help but sneak a glance at a sleeping Jane once he sat down. Her hair was curly once more and she looked even cuter than usual in her baggy sweatshirt that seemed to swallow her.

As the credits for the movie started to roll Mike looked around the room and discovered that he was the only one still awake. He got up to shut the movie off before returning to his sleeping bag and lying flat on his back. Mike was wide awake so he simply let his thoughts run wild, most of them ending up at the same spot; kissing Jane only a couple hours before. Had he completely messed everything up? His first instinct was to say no. She had kissed him back. But they'd hardly spoken since it happened, the only exception being the car ride back. So maybe he had ruined everything. They'd both been trying so hard to convince their friends that they could be friends and nothing more and he'd gone and proven them right. As he lay wide awake only inches away from her he realized that Nancy was right.

He wanted to be more than friends with Jane. So badly. He wanted to be able to kiss her like that whenever he wanted. Or to know exactly what she meant when she held his hand. He wanted them to be a real couple, not just dressed up as one. He didn't want to feel so defensive

when his friends teased him for his very obvious crush on her. Being friends with Jane was so easy that it was effortless. But still he wanted something more. Mike pulled his sleeping bag over his head as if to hide from how much he wanted her.

It must have been an hour that he was lost in his own thoughts when suddenly a sharp breath cut through the silence in the room. He pulled his sleeping bag down so he could somewhat see. Through the darkness he could sense movement next to him, followed by a quiet groan. Just as he was sure that Jane had woken up he could see her hand sticking out next to her before landing on his shoulder.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Did I wake you up?"

"No." Her air mattress groaned as she moved to sit up and turn to face him. He struggled to see her in the darkness and was able to make out her form. "You okay?" he whispered.

"Nightmare." She answered just as quietly. "I was going to take a walk and try not to step on you."

"Do you want me to come with you?"

There was a beat of silence before he heard her voice again. "Can you?"

"Yeah of course."

They both got to their feet and held onto each other as the maneuvered around the room to get to the door. Mike managed to find his keys and stuck them in his pocket before they went outside. Thanks to the bright moon and a few porch lights scattered across the street he was able to see her a bit more clearly. She had her arms wrapped around herself and wore a slightly worried expression. He had to hold himself back from reaching out to her. Since neither of them had shoes on they settled for sitting down on the lawn towards the street. Mike was struck with how similar the circumstances were to only hours earlier when he had kissed her.

"Are you still drunk?" he asked her once they were sitting.

Jane shrugged, making her sweatshirt hang lower off her shoulders. "A little." She admitted. "My head hurts like hell but at least I don't feel sick anymore."

He knew exactly what she meant about the head pain. A headache of his own has settled in at some point in the night. "That's good." Mike pulled his knees against his chest and propped his chin up. "So you had a bad dream?" In his peripheral vision he saw her nod her head. "You wanna talk about it?"

Jane shook her head. "Not really."

"You sure?"

"Yeah." She answered. "I don't wanna cry."

Mike picked his head up and looked over at her, searching her expression. Since she was staring straight forward he couldn't read her very well. Not that he excelled at reading her in the first place. "Do you want a hug?"

Jane nodded a few times before moving closer to him and wrapping her arms around his neck. She had her forehead pressed against his cheek and he could feel her breath once more ticking his neck. They stayed like that for a while, neither of them moving. Although Mike was now fully aware of his feelings for Jane he was able to hold himself back surprisingly well. Perhaps even more than before. At least he knew exactly *why* he was always itching to touch her so bad.

"You sure you don't wanna tell me about your dream?" he asked, curious about what kind of things her subconscious could concoct that would scare her.

"I don't know." She admitted.

"Why don't you tell me and if you change your mind you can stop?"

Jane pulled away from him and rubbed both of her eyes with the sleeve of her sweatshirt. He couldn't tell if she was just tired or if she was starting to cry. "Yeah okay." She said. "I had a dream that we

were in the hotel from *The Shinning* and you got locked in the freezer like Jack did in that one scene. And I was running around the whole place trying to find something to get it open with. It felt like forever that I was looking. When I finally found a key it got really dark inside so I couldn't find my way back. And it was like my legs stopped working so I had to crawl through the hotel. I finally got to the kitchen and unlocked the freezer but when I went inside to look for you the door closed again and I was stuck inside with the key. And you weren't even in there."

"Wow."

"Yeah." Jane groaned and leaned backwards until she was lying in the grass with her arm draped across her eyes. "I'm really scared."

He gently bumped his leg against hers. "Why?" he asked. Something in her voice when she said it gave him the impression that it was more than just the dream.

"Because." She let out a long sigh before rolling over onto her stomach. If she didn't seem so distraught Mike might have laughed. "Ugh this sucks."

Mike turned towards her slightly, nudging him again. "Jane what's up?" he asked. "You can tell me."

Jane groaned, her voice muffled. "I'm scared because... because I really like you."

"What?"

Jane kicked his foot. "Don't pretend like you didn't know just to make me feel better it's not worth it."

Mike's head was spinning. "I'm not pretending. Seriously. I don't know what you're talking about."

She turned her head just enough so they could see each other. Even in the dark he could see that her face was a few shades darker than usual. "Really?" she asked. Mike nodded, too tongue tied to speak. Jane pushed herself back up into a sitting position and turned to face him. "It's not like I tried to hide it, you know."

"You could have fooled me." He managed to say.

Jane's face broke out into a grin, causing his stomach to do a back flip. Though he had a hard time believing she meant what he said he enjoyed hearing it none the less. Jane was spectacular and it seemed like a miracle that she could ever have any sort of feelings for him. He would need serious luck for that to happen, and Mike wasn't exactly a good luck charm. Probably the luckiest thing that had happened to him was meeting Jane in the first place. He didn't think he could ask for much more than that.

"Why are you scared?" he asked, remembering what she had said before.

She shifted slightly, clearly uncomfortable. "Um..." she began, her voice faltering slightly. "No one really knows this. I mean Max does a little bit. But not a lot of it."

Mike reached for her hand, gently pulling her towards him. "You can tell me."

Her eyes fell down to their hands, a nervous smile spreading on her face. Mike wished he could take a look inside her brain so she wouldn't have to say whatever was making her so uncomfortable. But instead he just waited for her to speak. "I knew this guy back in Chicago." She finally said, still not able to look at him. "We were best friends. Like inseparable. Then we ended up dating and it was... really bad."

"How?"

"Things with us were just really toxic." She explained. "We were too similar. At the end things were just really unhealthy. He cheated on me and I went a little crazy. Like keyed his car and threw a rock through his window crazy. We broke up right after that and haven't spoken since." Jane pulled their intertwined hands into her lap and started rubbing her thumb across the back of his hand. The feeling sent goosebumps up his arm. Just before she spoke again she reached up to wipe at her cheek. "I really like you Mike, you have no idea. But I'm so scared of ruining how good we are right now."

He was torn between the giddiness that she actually liked him back and the need to do something to make her feel better. Mike had to hold himself back from pulling her close to him again. "So what do you want to do?"

"I don't know." She admitted, her voice hardly above a whisper. If the whole neighborhood wasn't asleep he might not have heard her.

"Well I'll do whatever you wanna do." he said, gently squeezing her hand. "I really, *really* like you. And I don't want you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable."

Jane looked back up at him, a smile once again starting to appear. "Do you think we can just figure it out as we go along?"

"Yeah, sure."

Her smile grew twice in size and closed the distance between them so she could wrap her arms around his neck. "You're the best, Mike." She said, her lips right next to his ear. "I really mean it."

Mike had his forehead pressed against her neck and his arms tightly wrapped around her waist. "I think you're the best."

Something about the unknown had always been scary to him, which was why nightmares involving space and the sea had always been the most frightening to him. Anxiety bumped along with his blood that things with Jane were so up in the air. But it helped that he knew where he stood with her. They liked each other. She *liked* him. And he was much more scared of Jane getting hurt than he was of the unknown.

He'd never taken the time to really think about what being with Jane would be like. They were very similar, which he figured was part of what made her so scared. Plus, Mike had never had a proper girlfriend before. He'd gone on a date or two, sure. But he'd never had an exclusive girlfriend. Yet another thing Mike wasn't a fan of was change. Why change the way things with Jane were when they were so good?

Since neither of them were tired they lay flat on their backs, shoulder

to shoulder and knee to knee, and stared up at the sky. Jane told him more about Chicago and her old school, and even a touch more about her family. She said that she had an older sister who still lived in the city and last time she checked he was on the same drugs their mom was so they weren't in contact anymore.

"If she stopped taking drugs would you talk to her again?" he asked her.

Jane shrugged, her arm moving against his. "Maybe." She said. "We were never really that close. Not like you and Nancy or anything. I have my dad. He's enough."

Mike turned on his side so he could look at her, the smile she gave him when he did transferring onto his own face. "Do you ever miss her? Your mom, I mean."

"Honestly, this might sound awful, but I don't." Jane told him. "I have people in my life that really care about me and that mean a lot to me. My dad, Max, you, the guys. I don't need someone like that to ruin everything all the time."

"It doesn't sound awful." He said. "That makes a lot of sense."

Jane grinned at him, propping herself up on her elbows. "I can't believe you didn't know I liked you. I made it pretty obvious and dropped a bunch of hints."

He raised an eyebrow at her, though he doubted she could see. "Oh yeah?" he asked, "Like what?"

She rolled her eyes at him. "Oh, I don't know, like holding your hand in the movies and suggesting we do a couples costume. And giving you, like, a million opportunities to say that you didn't wanna just be friends."

"You could have said it too." Mike pointed out.

"I just did like twenty minutes ago."

She reached over to shove his arm but he quickly grabbed her hand and pulled her closer to him. Jane's grin spread even wider and

before he knew what he was doing he was kissing her again.

He knew he probably shouldn't have. That logically speaking it would have been best until they walked about what was going on between them a bit more thoroughly. But the combination of the knowledge that she liked him and the way she was grinning at him through the dark made it impossible for him not to. Before he could consider pulling away and possibly start a somewhat serious conversation about where they stood Jane threw her arms around his neck with so much force that she sent him flat on his back in the grass.

She pulled away and he could feel her eyes scanning his face. "Sorry." She said. "I got a bit too enthusiastic."

"Your enthusiasm is appreciated."

He heard her let out a quiet laugh before inching closer to him and kissing him again. By their third kiss Mike thought he was getting used to the feeling (not that it didn't feel good anymore. It felt *amazing*. But it didn't come as an earth quaking shock to his body any longer). At least he had thought so up until Jane bit down on his lower lip.

Mike had never *made out* with a girl before. 50% of why he hadn't was because the opportunity had never presented itself to him and the other 50% was his own anxiety that he wouldn't be good at it. Mike excelled overthinking simple things and ending up ruining them. And he did *not* want to ruin anything with Jane. But their bodies were pressed tighter together than they'd ever been and her hands were lost in his hair so it wasn't like he was going to push her away.

Touching Jane's tongue with his own was a feeling so blissful it was like god himself had designed it by hand. Or maybe everything about her was personally designed. She was so remarkable it was mind blowing to him that he couldn't believe he had missed her for so long. Ever since freshman year when she moved into down she had been hiding in plain sight, always managing to slip through the cracks of the student body and avoiding him like a game of cat and mouse.



It felt like forever that they lay on his front lawn exchanging saliva and soft moans. A pressure started to build up in his head and his stomach that he felt like he could explode. He had no clue what time it was when her lips left his and he let out a quiet sigh.

"We should go back inside." She said. "You need to get some sleep."

Mike put his head against the cool grass and closed his eyes. "I need a minute."

Jane snickered as she rolled off of him, one of her arms draped across his chest while he took deep breaths to stop his heart from beating so fast. "What are you thinking about?" she asked him.

"I'm thinking if you do that again you might kill me." She laughed once more and he could feel her moving next to him. Only seconds later he felt her lips against his neck. His body sparked with electricity and his arms pushed her away on their own accord. "I'll have an actual heart attack if you do that."

"Buzzkill."

Jane pushed herself to her feet and pulled Mike up next to her. They tiptoed back into the basement of his house and let out a sigh of relief when they saw none of their friends had been awake to notice them missing. Mike crawled back into the sleeping bag while Jane curled up on the air mattress next to him, all while still holding hands. It was amazing how things could change in a few days. Or even in a few hours. When she had gotten to his house to get ready he was convinced that Jane was just a touchy person and that there was no hidden meaning to her suggesting a couples costume.

"Hey Mike?"

"Yeah?"

The mattress groaned as she rolled over onto her side to face him. "Do you wanna come to my house on Monday after school?"

His stomach did a summersault at the thought. "Yeah, okay."

"Cool."

It took a little while for him to fall asleep, his body still buzzing with electricity from the feeling of Jane's tongue against his. When he finally started to drift off he imagined what her bedroom might look like and wondered if they would be there alone.

## 10. Alone Together

lol someone pointed out that Jane said Mike was her first kiss and then I went and gave her an ex boyfriend. I've figured out a way to explain it but I'll be in a later chapter. Ignore me please I'm kind of an idiot.

I'm just curious; how would you feel about a full r rated smut scene? I've never really written smut before but I'm willing to go out of my comfort zone if you guys would be interested. let me know what you think!

---

Mike was the last to wake up, which wasn't surprising since he was the last to fall asleep. He didn't wake up until Lucas tripped over him on his way back down the stairs. When he sat up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes Will handed him a plate of microwave waffles they'd all helped themselves to and told him that they were continuing the movie marathon. As he cut into his first piece Jane popped in his copy of *Carrie* and gave him a quick wink as she returned to her spot next to him, a silent reference to one of their previous costume ideas.

One by one everyone went home. Will's mom came to pick him up and offered Dustin a ride home. When Max commented that she needed to be going home soon Lucas took it upon himself to offer her a ride and looked a bit too happy when she agreed.

As they started to gather their things Max turned towards Jane. "You coming with?"

Jane shook her head. "My dad said he'd pick me up when he gets off work."

"Oh. I get it." she said, looking between her and Mike. "You just wanna be alone with Wheeler."

Jane grabbed the pillow behind her and chucked it at Max across the room who easily dodged it. "Someone's gotta help him clean up, Miss Messy Mayfield."

Max rolled her eyes and put her backpack on. "Yeah whatever. See ya."

Mike and Lucas exchanged a knowing look, two friends both about to be alone with a cute girl, and the door shut behind them and left him and Jane in silence besides the television. They hadn't been alone since their middle of the night make out session. If he wasn't so comfortable around Jane he would have been a nervous wreck. She had her empty plate in front of her and a blanket wrapped around her shoulders, making her look even more adorable than usual.

"You don't actually have to help me clean up." Mike said after a beat or two of silence.

"You're right." She agreed, shrugging the blanket off her shoulders. "I want to."

They waited until the end of the movie before they began straightening up. While the air mattresses deflated they threw away all the empty bags and bottles from their snacks and put all the extra blankets and pillows into a small closet next to the stairs. They exchanged favorite movies and songs as they worked and found out that they had even more in common. Once the room was straightened up they each grabbed an air mattress and struggled up the stairs with them.

She followed Mike to the closet down the hall where they were usually kept. While they struggled to stuff them onto the shelf he heard footsteps coming down the stairs. Out of all the people in the house it could have been he prayed it was Nancy. At least if it was her he wouldn't have to introduce them to Jane and answer questions about her once she was gone.

When they reached the kitchen to go back downstairs he sure enough spotted his older sister by the coffee machine dressed in pajamas and rubbing her eyes. At the sound of their footsteps she dropped her hands. She perked up only slightly when she saw Jane standing next to him.

"I'm making coffee." She said, weakly gesturing to the coffee pot. "You guys want some?"

"We made some earlier." Mike answered, itching to drag Jane down into the basement and away from his knowing sister.

"I hope you were responsible last night." Nancy said.

"Relatively."

She grinned and grabbed a mug from the cabinet. "As long as Jane's father doesn't stop by, and not just to pick her up."

Jane laughed while Mike muttered about Nancy being a hypocrite and obviously hungover before grabbing Jane's arm and pulling her with him down into the basement. The credits for last movie they had on were still rolling when they got downstairs so he took it out and set it back on the shelf. Behind him he heard a soft *click* and when he turned around he spotted Jane's camera in her hands and an ear to ear grin on her face.

"What's that for?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, taking the film and waving it around so it would develop faster. "Nothing." she said simply, but he could tell by the look on her face that it wasn't just *nothing*.

"Oh yeah? Nothing."

Jane looked at the picture and smiled even more, sticking it in one of the pockets of her backpack. "You looked cute."

He felt all the blood in his body rush to his face. Mike was tempted to pull the collar of his shirt over his head and hide until his skin tone evened out but resisted the urge. He crossed the room until he stood next to her. "I'll take an even better one." He said, taking the camera from her and pointing it at her.

Jane groaned and held her hand up in front of her face, but he slipped his fingers between hers and moved it away. He took the picture when she smiled down at their joined hands and fully intended on storing it somewhere safe along with their Brad and Janet picture.

"What time do you have to go home?" he asked as he waved the

developing picture around.

"My dad's picking me up at 3." She told him. "Is that too late?"

Mike checked his watch and saw that it was already 2 pm. He felt his stomach sink slightly with disappointment. "I don't want you to leave."

He wasn't so usually so blunt about his feelings towards other people. He had always been scared of being vulnerable about his feelings. Scared that people would use it against him. It took years of friendship to admit to his friends that they meant so much to them. Even then he had to do it one person at a time. Yet there he was, being blunt about his feelings with Jane, whom he'd only known a little over two weeks. His heart pounded nervously, anticipating her rejection.

But it didn't come. She smiled even wider and squeezed his hand lightly. "I don't want to leave either." She told him. "I had a lot of fun. And not just the kissing."

"That was a highlight of the night though."

She pulled him towards her and he had to hold himself back from not kissing her. "Definitely." She agreed. "I've probably said it like a million times already but you're the best, Mike."

"Stop."

Jane smacked his arm lightly. "No *you* stop. I really mean it. You're being so patient with me and all of this." She waved her hand back and forth between them, indicating whatever it was that was going on. "It just means a lot to me."

Mike shrugged. "What did you expect me to do?"

"I don't know." She admitted. "Just not this."

He was once again struck with the realization of how badly he could fall for Jane if he really let himself go. Mike already felt wrapped around her finger and had no objections. She could break his heart beyond repair and he knew it. But as long as he got to be with her for

a little while before it would be worth it. Jane was an angel, thrust into his life by the controllers of the universe as a reward for putting up with such a painfully average life. Before he had met Jane it was like his life was 75% saturated. It was fine, good enough, and not particularly extraordinary. Her entrance had bumped it up to 110%.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked him, a question she seemed to like to ask him at the most inconvenient times.

There was no way he was explaining all of *that* to her. "I don't wanna think."

He placed her camera down on the couch and leaned down to kiss her. They were still riding out the high of admitting their feelings to one another. Once things settled down they would likely be less touchy, he was sure. But until then he intended on enjoying himself with their alone time.

Jane's hands landed on the back of his neck, her fingertips getting lost in his hair. His were placed on the small of her back, where her sweatshirt met her pajama shorts. He was teetering dangerously close to the edge of a tall cliff, only inches away from making *the fall*. Thankfully Jane pushed him back towards the couch and away from certain death. In one swift motion her hands were on his shoulders, pushing him down into a sitting position and her following close behind, her knees planting on either side of his waist.

"Is this too much?" she asked, a hint of uncertainty in her voice.

"Absolutely not."

Their lips connected again and Mike held tightly onto her waist to keep her from falling backwards. Her fingertips traced up and down his back, leaving his skin buzzing with electricity. It was the first time they'd ever kissed without a drop of alcohol in their system and, if it was even possible, it was even better. With his mind totally clear and his body completely in control he could feel the effect of her kiss in every cell of his existence. The 110% saturation that Jane had turned his life into was suddenly 200%.

Mike peppered kisses all along her jaw line and down her neck,

hoping to have even a fraction of the effect on her that she had on him. He felt her fingers wrap around the back of the collar of his shirt and hold on with a tight grip. Small noises escaped her lips, noises he knew he would hear for a million nights while trying to sleep. He knew he should stop, that they were treading into dangerous territory for two people who were technically still just friends. But the skin of her neck was so warm and soft and the way she said his name, barely above a whisper and more to herself than to him, skyrocketed him all the way up to cloud nine. Jane was more addicting than any drug being sold on the streets and sweeter than the most expensive dessert.

The doorbell echoed throughout the house and froze them both in place. Jane was the first to move, slipping her hands off his neck and looking at her watch. He saw her eyes go wide before she pushed herself off him. "*Shit.*" She said, hurrying over to her backpack. "It's 3:10."

Mike was paralyzed with shock for a couple seconds while she frantically stuffed her belongings in into her backpack. *They'd been making out for an hour.*

He snapped himself back to reality and pushed himself to his feet as she slipped her backpack onto her back. "Do you need help with anything?"

"Um, I think I have everything." She said, her eyes scanning over the room for anything she might have missed. "If you find something I left just call me later on and I can come pick it up."

"Yeah, okay."

They were both quiet, neither of them moving as they stared at each other. The muffled sound of Nancy answering the door and greeting Jim Hopper made his cheeks turn pink at the possibility that they could have been caught. Jane shifted her weight from one leg to the other a few times. "Hey, so," she began, her voice trailing off slightly, "we're okay right?"

He could see his own worry of what had happened between them having a negative effect reflected in her face like a mirror. "Yeah," he said because it was the answer he wanted to be true. "We're okay."



A small smile somewhat replaced her worried expression. "Okay, cool."

She started for the stairs but he quickly grabbed her hand to stop her, his eyes glued on a bright red mark on her neck that would most definitely be a hickey in a few hours. He fixed her sweatshirt higher up in an attempt to hide it. "Sorry." He mumbled.

Jane grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him down to her height, her lips connecting with his neck as she worked pure magic for a minute and 30 seconds straight. When she pulled away a satisfied grin spread on her face. "There." She said, her hands dropping back to her sides. "We're even."

She hurried up the stairs and he followed closely behind, messing with the collar of his shirt and wondering just how bad of a mark she had left. He swallowed a nervous lump in his throat when they got upstairs and followed the voice of her father out into the foyer. He'd had only a handful of encounters with Jim Hopper that had went perfectly fine. But after making out with his daughter for an hour straight he was suddenly the most intimidating person he'd ever seen.

"Sorry I took so long." Jane said when they came into sight. "I didn't realize what time it was so I had to pack my things up."

"No problem." He replied. Mike searched his face for any sign that he knew before he realized there was no way he *could* know. "You have fun?"

Jane nodded and bumped her shoulder against Mike's. "Definitely."

All the blood in his body rushed to his face so fast he thought he might pass out.

She told Nancy it was nice to meet her and bid Mike goodbye with the promise of seeing him in school on Monday. He gave her dad what was probably the most awkward wave in history before they disappeared behind the front door. Mike turned to escape downstairs where he could regulate his breathing and blood flow but Nancy grabbed his arm before he could.

"Not so fast." She said yanking him backwards. "So? How did it go?"

"It was fine." He answered shortly.

She opened her mouth to say something, but whatever it was it never came out when her gaze dropped slightly. "Mike oh my god, what is *that*?"

His hand flew up to the mark Jane had left just before they came up the stairs. "Nothing." he shot back. "It's a rash."

"No it's *not*." Nancy grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand away so she could look at the mark, which only made his face turn hotter. "Holy shit. Did Jane give you that?"

"I have to cover it up before mom gets home." He said instead of answering.

A mischievous grin spread on her face and she let go of him. "How about this, I cover it up for you if you tell me what happened?"

As much as he didn't want tell Nancy he knew he would much prefer explaining it to her than to their mom. "Fine." He said reluctantly before following her upstairs and into her room.

She sat him down at her desk and opened a drawer, pulling out a few makeup items he had no clue how to identify. "Start talking." She said.

"So I got... a little drunk." He said, then gauged her reaction before continuing. "Or a lot drunk. We were sitting outside because she didn't feel good and, I don't know, I just did it."

"Kissed her?"

"Yeah." Out of the corner of his eye he could see her take out what looked like red makeup and start putting it on his neck. Though he had no clue why red would help he stayed silent. "We all came back here after the party and were watching movies. Everyone else fell asleep but me and she woke up with a nightmare so we went to go outside for a bit and we were just talking. Then she said she was scared because she liked me and that she had dated someone she was

friends with before and it worked out really bad and she didn't want it to happen to us."

"So you're not dating her?"

"No."

"Then why did she give you a hickey?"

He felt his face go as red as the mark on his neck. "I gave her one first so she made it even."

Nancy snorted as she picked up the tan colored makeup that she applied over the red. "So she likes you, huh? I knew it."

"Shut up."

She clearly ignored him by the way she didn't shut up. "So when are you gonna ask her to be your girlfriend?"

"I'm not going to." He answered, holding himself back from rolling his eyes. "She said that she doesn't really know what she wants and I don't want to pressure her by asking her out."

"Bull." Nancy said, standing up straight and inspecting the coverage of her makeup. "She knows exactly what she wants. She wants you but she's just scared. But how scared can she be if you guys are giving each other hickies."

"I'm not asking her out."

She made a disapproving noise and started putting back the makeup she had used on him. "Alright, do whatever you want." She said, "But I'm telling you that you should just go for it. You both obviously know what you want."

Instead of replying he thanked her for covering up the mark on his neck and went into his bedroom down the hall to sleep off what little was left of his hangover. As he climbed into bed his eyes landed on the fake glasses for his Brad costume and swore he could feel the ghost of Jane's lips brushing against his skin.

## 11. Addicted in the AV Room

I promise not every chapter will be just Jane and Mike alone with each other I have some things planned.

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The weekend following Halloween was the longest weekend of his life. Mike was constantly struggling to keep himself busy so he wouldn't call Jane. He searched the basement top to bottom for something of hers that she might have left so he had an excuse to call but he didn't find anything. Mike spent almost the whole day Saturday lying in bed, alternating between sleeping off the rest of his hangover and overthinking about everything that had happened. His mind was a tornado of worries. One of the few times Nancy stopped in to check on him she suggested putting his thoughts on paper in an attempt to sort them out. But after ten minutes of writing all he read back was a nonsense train of thought.

*I don't know what to do I don't know what to do I just want her to like me. I don't want to hurt her. I want her so bad. She has no clue. I think she might kill me. Is she really scared or is she just not interested? There's no one on earth like Jane. Jane Jane Jane. Jane Hopper is magic. I love the way she makes me feel. I hate the way she makes me feel. 36 hours until I go to school and see her again. I might be alone in her house on Monday. What if she loses interest in me? What if she gets too scared and dumps me? What if I push her too hard and scare her off? What if I fall in love with her? I think I might fall in love with her. I. Am. Terrified.*

Writing everything down only made him feel worse.

He spent all day Sunday in the basement watching movies and curled up in the blanket Jane had slept with on Halloween night. Mike was convinced that his feelings for Jane were like some viral infection. He felt drowsy and fatigued when he thought of how much longer he had to wait to see her. His body temperature started to climb when he remembered what her touch felt like. He became shaky when he thought of messing things up with her. Or perhaps he was addicted to her and was going through withdrawals. Whatever it was it made waiting for Monday morning hell.

"Okay what's going on?" Nancy asked when she came down to check on him Sunday night. "Did you guys break up already?"

"I think I just miss her."

"Man you're so whipped."

Mike's anxiety practically woke him up at the crack of dawn Monday morning. Or more specifically 6:30 am. After changing his clothes three times he settled for what he had on and made his way downstairs to eat something for breakfast. But he really only picked at his food since his stomach was such a nervous wreck.

While he ate Nancy leaned over and whispered so their mom wouldn't hear from where she stood at the sink. "Relax, why don't you? You're hanging out at her house not proposing to her."

When he finally finished eating he used his anxious energy to bike even faster to school than he normally did. He pushed himself a bit harder than usual to keep his mind from drifting into overthinking territory. He'd had enough time to worry. For the first time in weeks, or even 17 years, he let his mind go blank and focused on nothing else besides the chill of the November wind that scratched at his face as he pedaled.

Both Dustin and Will's bike and Lucas' car were already at school when he arrived. He let out a sigh of relief that he wouldn't have the time to stress too much before classes started. After stopping by his locker and getting the books he needed and started wandering around the school to look for his friends (or Jane). He finally found them by Will's locker laughing about something as Mike approached.

When he finally reached them Lucas bumped his shoulder against his. "Hey Brad, where's Janet?"

Mike rolled his eyes while Dustin and Will snickered. "Haha very funny. What about you and Max, huh?"

"Well I'm not about to kiss and tell."

"You just did." Dustin pointed out.

"Speaking of which." Will said, catching Mike's eye. "You wanna tell them what you told me on Friday?"

Mike felt his stomach sink slightly as his two friends turned towards him. If he were being honest he hadn't planned on mentioning anything having to do with Jane until they figured things out a bit more. The way things were Mike still wasn't sure exactly where he stood with her. He knew with the logical side of his brain that she clearly had feelings for him. She was the one who brought it up to him. She kissed him back. All the signs pointed to her feeling at least similarly to how he felt about her. But he knew his friends would have questions that he wouldn't be able to answer. Still he knew it might be nice to get advice from someone other than Nancy. And from someone who saw them interact. Of course he wasn't going to tell them everything until he knew what was really going on. But he could let them in on a little bit.

"Um..." he scratched the back of his neck, anticipating a dramatic reaction from them. "At the party Jane and I sort of kissed."

Lucas' mouth dropped open while Dustin's eyes went wide exactly like how he expected. "You *what*?"

He pushed his backpack higher on his shoulders nervously. "Don't look so surprised, you guys have been telling me to for like two weeks."

"Yeah but we didn't think you would *do* it!" Dustin exclaimed loud enough to turn a few heads. Mike shushed him and sent him a glare but he hardly noticed. "You must have been totally wasted."

"A little bit." He admitted. "I don't know, we were talking and then I didn't know what to say so I just did it." Mike glanced around the hallway to make sure Jane wasn't around. She had a tendency to sneak up on him when she saw him in the halls. "I think she might like me."

"More like definitely." Lucas chimed in.

"Yeah but I don't know what to do." Mike continued. "I mean she's an amazing friend and I don't wanna ruin things between us by getting

too involved you know? I'm just totally out of my comfort zone."

"Take it from someone who doesn't have the love goggles on." Dustin said, "She's crazy about you. She gets the same look on her face that you do when you're around each other. And when she not so subtly asked you to sit alone with her in the movies?"

"Yeah but what do I *do*?"

"As her out idiot!"

Mike groaned and leaned against the locker next to Will. If only he could explain that it wasn't so simple without giving away everything that had happened. They were just as nosy as Nancy, and though he knew it came from love, it sometimes made it hard to talk about things. With every question he answered they had five more.

"Quick, talk about something else." Lucas said suddenly. "They're coming over here."

Mike picked his head up and searched the hallway. Sure enough he spotted Jane and Max heading right towards them. With a large black sweatshirt and dark wash jeans she looked completely adorable. He noticed that the collar of the sweatshirt was high enough to cover up the mark he had made on her neck two days earlier. Though her hair was tied up, leaving the rest of her skin exposed and tempting him even more than usual. Her gaze met his just before he was about to look away and a dazzling smile appeared that lit up the whole hallway.

"See?" Dustin said. "She totally likes you."

Mike looked away to glare at Dustin. "Shut up and talk about something else."

Will quickly started up a conversation about midterms while they all watched the two girls approaching out of the corner of their eye. Dustin was complaining about his history class a bit more dramatically than usual when they reached them. Jane stood close enough next to him that he felt her brush her hand against his in a way that was clearly deliberate without anyone noticing. His lips

ached to kiss her but he kept his back firmly pressed against the lockers to try and control himself. Not being able to touch her was *definitely* more difficult when she was standing right next to him.

"The only good thing about finals is that it's a whole week of half days." Max said, looking just as apprehensive about the upcoming tests as he felt.

"We should all do something that week." Will suggested. "I mean, since we have the time."

He felt Jane's arm brushed against his as she perked up. "We should go on a weekend trip or something. We can leave on Friday after we finish the last final."

"Where would we go?" Max asked.

"It's only an hour and a half to Chicago from here." She looked over at her friend. "You always said you wanted to see the city. We can take two cars and get three hotel rooms."

The first bell rang and promptly cut their conversation short. "We'll definitely have to figure something out." Lucas said, and they all agreed before going their separate ways.

Mike only made it a few feet before he heard hurried footsteps behind him. Only moments later Jane appeared next to him, her ponytail bouncing a few times before she slowed to match his pace. "Hey."

"Hey."

She fixed her sweatshirt to be higher up on her neck and he felt like apologizing for leaving a mark again. "You're still coming over today, right?"

"Yeah, of course." He said. "Why wouldn't I?"

Jane shrugged, her eyes looking out into the crowded hall. "I don't know."

"You thought I might be having second thoughts?" he guessed.



He could see her jaw getting tighter. If he hadn't been looking at her so closely he would have missed it. "Are you?"

"No." he said. And he meant it. As worried as he'd been the past two days that something could go wrong he never for a moment second guessed his feelings for Jane or his certainty that he wanted to be with her. Hindsight was crystal clear and he now knew that he had fallen for her hard the second they met in the closet of Jennifer Haye's basement. "Are you?"

A small smile spread on her face and she linked her arm with his. "No." she told him, and as far as he could tell she meant it. "I'm still just... scared. Which is probably really stupid."

"It's not stupid at all."

"I just don't know if I'd forgive myself if I ruined things with you."

He wanted to tell her that it wasn't going to happen. That they would be fine. But he had no way of knowing how things would play out. It could turn out that all of her fears would come true. It could turn out that they were meant to be. Or anything else in between. All he knew was that he was head over heels for her and he would be for a while.

"It's okay." He said, choosing to ignore his worries that she might be right. "I'm fine with whatever you want to do."

"What I really want to do" she said, leaning closer to him, "is be late for homeroom so we can be alone for a little while."

Mike had been late to class three times in his entire school career. The first was because he had a doctor's appointment first thing in the morning and came in halfway through third period. The second was when Troy had hit him in the face with a dodgeball and given him a bloody nose that kept him in the nurses office for an hour and a half. The third was because he had been talking to Mr. Clarke too long about a project. He had never made the choice to be late to class. And he had never planned on missing class unless it was incredibly important.

But he never planned on meeting Jane Hopper. And he never planned

on falling for her the way he had in such a short amount of time. Even the mere suggestion of having some time alone made his hands itch to touch her. Without hesitation he pulled his keys out of his pocket and pulled her in the direction of the AV room.

"We can't be too late though." He said, more to himself than to her. "I have English first period and I can't afford to miss the reading today."

"What are you reading for the class?" she asked, following close behind despite her disadvantage of having much shorter legs.

"Gatsby."

He heard her scoff behind him. "I could write the midterm essay for Gatsby in my sleep. If you miss anything I'll help you later today."

Part of him wished she hadn't offered because he was suddenly less motivated to go back to class.

He unlocked the small room with the key he'd been given by Mr. Clarke. If Lucas or Dustin had been AV club president there was no way they would have gotten key privileges. But because Mike had a way with words when it came to talking to teachers he was given the key as long as he promised not to abuse it. And he never had. He figured he could just this once.

Jane flipped the light switch on while he closed the door, locking it just in case someone were to come inside. He watched her take the room in and wander over to the bookshelf. She ran her fingers across the spines of a few books. "This stuff is really cool."

"Most people would disagree."

"Most people are stupid." She slipped her backpack off her shoulders and set it down in the chair he usually sat in. "They don't know what they're missing out on."

Mike shrugged, "Yeah, I guess."

Jane came over, wrapping her arms around his waist and resting her chin on his chest. He wished that they weren't in school or that it was much later in the day. At some point they'd have to say goodbye for a

couple of hours. He could only imagine how distracted he would be in his classes.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, stealing the question she often asked him.

She hummed quietly, biting down on her lower lip as she thought. "I'm thinking that you're really cute and I don't know what you see in me."

"That's a joke right?"

"No."

"Well I'll tell you what I see in you." He pulled one of her hands off his waist so he could count his points off on her fingers. "One: you're the cutest thing I've ever seen. Two: you think that all of this" he waved his other hand around indicating the AV room "is cool. Three: you're hilarious. Four: you're so smart. Should I continue?"

Jane shook her head and wrapped her hand around his so he couldn't continue counting off points. "No, I believe you." She said.

"Well too bad I have one more point."

She rolled her eyes dramatically. "Alright. What is it?"

"There's no one else quite like you. Ever."

A smile took over her face and her arms wrapped around his neck, her thumb brushing over the faded mark she had left on his skin. "There's no one like *you*. Ever."

Before he could protest she stood on her toes and pressed her lips to his. His body exploded into the same routine of fireworks it had when they had been in his basement. He was thankful that they were at school, knowing that it would keep him from going too far. Jane's touch was addictive and he had no clue how to stop himself. He didn't think he had the willpower to push her away. Not just because he didn't want to hurt her feelings but because he simply couldn't say no to her.

The clock on the wall behind him ticked away but Mike felt as if they were frozen in time. The feeling of her teeth biting on his lower lip sent shivers up his spine, and the way her fingers danced along his torso made involuntary noises come out of him. It occurred to him that the more time he spent with Jane the more danger he was in of falling in love with her. He knew the solution; put some space between them. But it was simply not an option. The only way he would be separated from her was if he didn't have a choice.

The feeling of her hands disappeared and for a moment he thought she was going to push him away. It wasn't until he heard a quiet *zip* that he realized that she was discarding her top layer. She shrugged her sweatshirt off her shoulders and tossed it on top of her backpack all without breaking the kiss. His lips moved from hers to her jawline and it was then he realized that she wore only a tank top. Perhaps the most dangerous thing she could wear around him. He pulled away from her just long enough to turn them around so she was the one leaning against the desk and left her up. With her sitting on the desk they were the same height and solved the problem of him having to lean down so much and possibly have a crick in his back for the rest of the day. Her hands gripped onto his shirt between his shoulder blades while he kissed her neck and tried, and likely failed, not to leave any marks.

Her felt her hands travel down to his waist before she gripped onto the hem of his shirt and started to lift it up. In his lust filled haze he had a moment of clarity and he managed to pull away from the kiss, struggling to catch his breath for a moment. "Wait, hold on a second."

"Is something wrong?" a shallow crease settled between her brows that he wanted to wipe away with his thumb.

"No, no, absolutely not." He said. Mike knew that if they went too far that he wouldn't be able to control himself at all. And the AV room wasn't exactly the ideal setting for *that*. He glanced up at the clock on the wall and felt his stomach sink slightly. "We're already ten minutes late to class."

Jane groaned and rested her forehead on his shoulder. "I don't want to go yet." She said. "Can't we just stay here for a little bit?"

He knew what the right thing to do was. His grades in English were already struggling and he knew he likely couldn't afford to miss any more than he already had. But Jane wrapped her arms around his waist before he could answer and he felt all his willpower deteriorate. "Yeah, okay."

He felt her turn her head to the side, some of her loose curls tickling his neck. "Maybe more than a little bit?"

"Probably."

They ended up staying in the AV room for the entirety of first period. Once they got to talking it was like they couldn't stop. Before either of them knew it the bell for second period was ringing and they rushed to gather their things. She kissed him before he could reach for the doorknob. "I'll meet you by your locker after school, okay?"

He was already anxious to see her again and she hadn't even left yet. "Okay."

She gave his hand a light squeeze before letting go and opening the door out into the hallway. Jane flashed him one last smile before heading to her class, the opposite direction of his.

As he made his way to PE he tried his best to clear his mind of Jane so he would at least have a chance of focusing for the rest of the day. But she seemed to be comfortable where she was in the forefront of his thoughts. Knowing that she was in the building but that he couldn't be near her was ;pretty much torture. It was scary how attached he was to her. He was thankful that she was still interested in him since he was sure if she ended what they were starting he would be devastated.

Mike was so lost in thought that he hadn't even noticed Troy Harrington approaching until he bumped into him. His stomach sank, preparing for whatever torment he was about to receive. But all he got was a glare and a "watch it, Wheeler."

He counted his blessings as he hurried the rest of the way to the gymnasium.

## 12. Tender Curiosity

back at it again with another chapter! I hope you guys enjoy the fluff

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When the last bell rang Mike practically jumped out of his chair and three feet into the air. Going through the school day knowing that he would be going to Jane's house immediately after was a kind of torture that should have been classified as cruel and unusual punishment. Mike had spent the whole day glancing at the clock to count just how much longer he had to wait until he would meet Jane at her locker. And every time he looked it wasn't nearly close enough. He ignored the smirk that spread on Will's face as he collected his things, feeling blush start to coat his cheeks.

"Excited?" Will asked him, getting out of his own chair.

"You could say that."

Mike was practically buzzing as they weaved their way through the halls and to his locker, keeping an eye out for Jane. The more time went by the more nervous he became about being in her house. Alone. He had no idea why he was such a mess of anxieties. They'd been mostly alone in his house before. Something about going to her place felt more important. It was *her* house. The place where she went every day after school. The place where she had (hopefully) thought about him at least once before.

Will leaned on the locker next to his while he put in the combination. "Why do I get the feeling that you left something out when you told them about Jane this morning?"

"Because you're a mind reader." He replied. Whether Will was an expert at reading body language or some kind of mutant who could read minds he wasn't sure. What he did know was that Will knew too much for his own good.

"You wanna tell me or am I gonna have to use my freaky mind powers?"

Mike let out a sigh, shoving his biology textbook into his locker. "I'll tell you." He said, somewhat reluctantly. Mike glanced up the hallway to make sure Jane was nowhere in sight. "So remember how I said I thought she liked me?" Will nodded his head. "Well I know she does. She told me."

He watched Will's eyes go as wide as saucers. "*What? When?*"

"At the sleepover. She woke up with a nightmare so we went outside for a little while and she just told me."

A wide grin spread over Will's face, likely in satisfaction that he'd been right about Jane's feelings. "So you guys are together now?"

"Sort of." Mike shut his locker and leaned against it. "We're not official or anything. She said she'd dated a friend of hers before and it ended really ugly so she's scared."

"Okay, let me get this straight." Will said. "You guys aren't boyfriend and girlfriend but you're together?" Mike nodded. "Well if you guys are acting like a couple doesn't that defeat the purpose of not being a couple?"

Mike hadn't thought about it that way. He was convinced Will was wired differently than him and that was why he was so much more intelligent when it came to social ques. "I mean I guess." He admitted. "But I don't want to scare her off and get too serious or anything."

"Putting a label on something doesn't change it at all. It just means that you know what to say when people ask about you guys." Will said. "Do you want to be official with her?"

"Yeah."

"Then I think you should push her a little bit." He saw Will's eye catch something down the hall before he straightened up. "She's coming, I'll see you later. Let me know how it goes tomorrow."

Mike felt even more confused than ever as Will walked away. Will and Nancy seemed so convinced that the right thing for him to do was to just suck it up and ask her out. But had they missed the part when he said Jane was scared of making things too official with him?

Did they not understand that he could lose her if he pushed her too hard? He was struck with the same frustration he had back when he was trying to convince everyone that he just wanted to be friends with her. Why could nobody listen?

Most of Mike's anxieties melted away when Jane finally reached him and flashed him a smile brighter than the lights above their heads. "Ready to go?"

"Yep."

His hand was itching to hold hers as they made their way to the front entrance. He knew that he needed to practice keeping some distance from her. If he became too dependent on her touch than he was setting himself up for some major disappointment. It helped that she walked close enough to him that their arms touched. Standing so close to her was like a magnetic pull that he struggled to resist.

"Do you want me to help you with English later on?" she asked once they were outside.

"Can you?"

"Yeah of course."

The walk to her house went by quicker than he expected it to. They talked the entire time about anything and everything. For the first time since the kiss at the Halloween party Mike felt in control around her. They were too busy talking for his mind to stray and thinking about kissing her. Though it was still different from before they'd gotten together. The air between them was different. She smiled wider and stood closer to him. There were flirtatious undertones in her voice. When he praised her for the score she'd gotten back on a test her cheeks turned bright pink. Things were just as easy with Jane as they had always been, just better.

Though some anxiety started to bubble back up when they walked up to her front door and she pulled her keys out. When he stepped inside the first thing he noticed was numerous picture frames hung up on the wall in the entrance. He could hear her groaning next to him but he ignored her and inspected each and every picture. Jane and her



father sitting in front of a birthday cake with the number 11 written in icing letters. Jane and Max sitting in front of a Christmas tree with hokey looking sweaters. A candid shot of Jane and a girl with much darker skin than her but with similar features sitting on a couch.

"Who's that?" he asked, his eyes still focused on the unknown girl.

"My sister Kali." She answered. "We have the same mother but our birth fathers are different. Obviously."

It was amazing how casually she talked about certain things. Like her mother who she'd been taken from or her sister who she was no longer in contact with. She talked about them as if she were discussing something as simple as the weather. Mike had a hunch that she cared more about things from her past more than she let on. As much as he wanted to ask her more about her life before Hawkins he was scared of opening up an old wound she had been avoiding. So he gave the pictures another once over before following her through the house.

Since there was only one floor he got to see almost the whole house on the way to her room. It had a homey feel that was surprising considering that both people who lived in the house were intimidating in their own way. There were picture frames hanging from a wall in every room of the house and scattered along the hallway. At the end of the hall Jane stopped in front of a door, glancing at him for just a moment before opening it.

Jane's room was perhaps the most surprising room in the house. From the way she dressed he expected something out of a punk rock music video but it was in fact quite the opposite. The walls were painted a blue color so light he had thought it was white for a moment. Posters for bands like Blondie and U2 were hung up on the wall as well as a few movie posters. Next to the door was a desk covered in papers, hair gel, and a few makeup products. She had a bookshelf next to her closet filled with books and movies and even a radio on the middle shelf. For how dark her wardrobe was her room was surprisingly bright.

As soon as she stepped inside Jane hurried over to her desk and started shoving some of the papers into drawers. "You'd think I would

have cleaned up a bit since I knew you were coming over."

Mike wasn't sure what she was talking about since her desk was the closest thing to a mess in the whole room.

She moved some of the pillows on her bed to make room for them both to sit. He wasn't at all used to seeing Jane nervous. But as they sat down he could see her uncertain expression and the way she fiddled with her hands. "Do you want me to help you with Gatsby?"

"Please."

She jumped off the bed and picked the book off the shelf, flipping to the chapter he told he'd read last. Jane took a moment to skim through a few pages before glancing at his homework. He heard her mutter about how easy the questions were before she began explaining the answers to him. She explained how the green light was a metaphor for how unreachable things like happiness through wealth and self-reinvention, and how when Daisy was crying about the shirts that she *wasn't* actually crying about the shirts but at the fact that Gatsby had become wealthy for the sole purpose of winning her over. Mike was admittedly impressed since he hadn't thought anything beyond green lights and shirts being green lights and shirts.

If he needed any more reason to not feel bad about missing class watching Jane talk about literature was certainly a reason. She stayed standing, pacing around the room and waving her hands around as she explained Gatsby's desperation to win over Daisy as if it were her own. Her nerves about being alone with Mike melted away when she told him it was no coincidence that Daisy was named after a flower with gold in it and that what Gatsby needed to win her over was money (or gold). He had never quite been a literature enthusiast but he was enthusiastic about listening to Jane talk about literature.

"Do you get it?" she asked when she was finally done.

"How could I not?" he replied, still scribbling down notes of what she had said on his homework. She laughed and walked back over to the bookshelf to put it back. "How do you know all that's stuff? I had no clue."

She shrugged. "I don't know. I guess it's kind of like how math is so easy for you and I have to write the Pythagorean theorem on my arm before I take a test."

Mike snorted. "Seriously?"

Jane replied by throwing a notebook from her shelf at him.

"This sweatshirt is too hot." She said before opening one of the drawers in her dresser and digging around. "Turn around."

"Why?"

"Because I'm about to change and I don't wanna go to the bathroom."

Mike turned his back to her and stared at his backpack while he tried not to imagine what was underneath the tank top she had on. But the soft *thud* of her sweatshirt falling on the floor made it pretty hard to ignore the fact that she was only feet away from him while not wearing a shirt. He heard her dresser drawer open and close again and only moments later she was sitting down on the bed across from him with a black t-shirt.

She opened her mouth to say something but her words were forgotten and she started laughing. "You're so *red*." She said, leaning over and pinching his cheeks. "You're adorable."

"*Stop*." He whined, but she only laughed harder. Mike lay flat on his stomach on her bed so his red face was hidden in her blankets.

The bed creaked as she moved closer to him and he then felt her put her knees on either side of his waist so she was straddling his back. He was incredibly glad that his face was hidden since it immediately got hotter. "Aw, are you *embarrassed*?"

Mike groaned into her blanket which only made her laugh.

He reached behind him and grabbed her thigh before turning over on his side and making her fall flat on her back. Jane burst out into another fit of contagious laughter as she tried to squirm away from him but he grabbed onto her waist so she couldn't get too far away. Mike propped himself up above her and she finally stopped

struggling. He held onto the collar of her shirt and pulled it down to check to see the mark he'd left on her only a couple of days ago. It was almost an identical shade of purple that his was.

"You gonna give me another one?" she asked, one of her eyebrows raising high on her forehead.

"Do you want me to?"

She turned her head to check the clock on her nightstand, humming quietly when she saw the time. "Well my dad gets home in half an hour."

"Then I'm not going to." He said before rolling to the side and lying next to her.

He heard her make a disappointed noise before turning to face him. "Buzzkill."

"Sorry if I don't want my only two interactions with your dad to be immediately after giving you a hickey. I'd like to not have a nervous breakdown in front of him."

"Fine." She said, sitting up and grabbing her backpack. "Help me with my math homework then."

Turns out she really wasn't kidding when she told him how bad at math she was. Since everything made such perfect sense to him he struggled to explain it in a way that would make sense to her. For half the questions he ended up just doing the problems for her and explaining it as he went along. Not that he was complaining. The way her eyebrows came together in an angry line and how her bottom lip stuck out was completely adorable. She groaned and complained when she didn't understand something and articulated everything he felt when he did English homework.

They were on the second to last question when the phone on her nightstand started to ring. She leaned over and picked it up, holding it between her ear and her shoulder. "Hello?"

Mike was sitting close enough that he could just hear the voice on the other line. "Hey, kid, it's me. Don't kill me okay? But I have to stay a

little later than usual."

He watched a frown spread on her face. "Really?"

"Yeah Callahan can't come in today and Porter was supposed to cover but he's coming in late. I might be another two hours."

Jane leaned her head back and moved the receiver away from her mouth so she could groan. "Yeah, alright. Do what you gotta do."

"Is your friend still there?"

She glanced at him for a quick moment. "His name is Mike and yes he's still here."

"Oh I know what his name is. I'll be home for dinner so why don't you ask him to stay for a little bit?"

The frown on her face turned into a grin as she perked up. "Really?"

"I mean it'd be nice to meet the kid for more than two minutes."

"Okay I'll ask him." They said goodbye to each other and she leaned back over to hang up the phone. When she turned back towards him a small, slightly bashful looking, smile was on her face. "You wanna stay for dinner?"

Mike pushed aside the butterflies that they would be alone in her house for another two hours and were free to do whatever they wanted. He was determined to control himself around her at least once. If he couldn't he was in serious trouble. "Yeah sure."

"We'll probably end up ordering something in." she said as she packed up her homework. "Is that okay?"

"Of course."

She hopped off the bed. "We've got two hours to kill. Wanna watch a movie?"

"Sure."

He followed her on her way back out into the living room. Halfway down the hallway she stopped short and looked at him over her shoulder. "Since we have more than half an hour are you going to give me another hickey?"

He could feel his face getting red again. "If you pick a good movie I will."

Jane ended up picking out *Dirty Dancing* which definitely classified as a good movie. Though he promised he would control himself around her for the day he had made her a deal and during the *Hungry Eyes* scene she was sitting so close to him that she was practically in his lap so he decided to make an exception for five minutes. But five minutes turned into thirty when she told him he needed to leave a mark under her shirt before taking it off. He was just thankful he was able to stop himself at all after seeing her in only a bra, an image he tried to memorize for nights when thoughts of her kept him from sleeping.

### 13. Jim Hopper: Mileven Shipper

This chapter is short and not as good but I hope it holds you guys over until the next one (which is definitely way more exciting)

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From where they sat on the couch Mike could hear the front door opening and closing and he guessed it could only be her dad. He could feel a whole new wave of anxiety take over, already worrying about saying something wrong or that might clue him in on what was going on between him and Jane. Mike had to take a mental step back and tell himself that they hadn't even properly met yet and he was worrying for nothing. There was some noise from the entrance hall, likely him taking his jacket and shoes off, before he heard his voice.

"Kid I'm home!"

Jane not so subtly put some distance between her and Mike before he walked in. "Sh! We're watching the best part!"

He wandered in to see what she was talking about and glanced at the tv, seeing the ending scene from *Dirty Dancing* playing and shaking his head. "Come into the kitchen when it's over."

Jane's eyes had been glued to the screen ever since she put her shirt back on after their make out session. But once her father was gone he felt her gaze on the side of his face. She leaned closer to him, her shoulder gently brushing against his. "Are you nervous?"

"No." he lied.

"You look nervous." She said before putting her hand on his shaking leg. "It'll be fine." She planted a short kiss on his cheek which he wished she hadn't since it only made him want to pull her back when she leaned away from him.

He and Jane weren't official. Technically speaking they were still just friends. He wasn't quite meeting his girlfriends dad but he had jitters none the less. Aside from being Jane's father and the chief of police he was still intimidating. Though Mike was definitely on the taller

side he was undeniably all bone and no muscle. The same couldn't be said for Jim Hopper who was only an inch or two taller than him but could probably throw Mike over his shoulder like a rag doll. He checked for the tenth time that the collar of Jane's shirt hid the marks he had made on her only an hour before. Just in case.

When the credits started to roll Jane hopped off the couch to take out the tape and set it back on the shelves next to the tv. She then came back over to him and grabbed his hand, pulling him to his feet. "Don't be so nervous." She said. "He's not that scary after you talk to him for a little while. Just don't call him sir, he hates being formal."

"Okay."

Her eyes searched his face and seemed to see that he was still a nervous wreck. She shot a quick glance at the doorway to make sure her dad was nowhere in sight before standing on her toes and kissing him. Only for a couple of seconds but still long enough to calm some of his nerves.

She held his hand as they walked through the house, letting go just before they made it to the kitchen. Her father had changed out of his uniform and was sat at the kitchen table looking over a few take out menus that he slid over when they sat across from him. "Jane's been talking about you for weeks." He said to Mike. "It's about time she invited you over."

Jane hid her face in the Chinese food menu she was holding. "Shut up please."

Hopper ignored her. "She said you're in the AV club? That's pretty cool."

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "I guess. It's only me and my best friends so half the time we really only just mess around." He admitted. Ever since they fixed the radio they had mostly spend AV club time joking around. "But we have our own room so that's pretty nice."

"The room is really cool." Jane chimed in, still reading over the menu. He noticed that her cheeks were still splotchy.



"This one's a nerd in disguise." Hopper said, pointing at her. "My god you should have heard her ramble on about that radio you guys have and how we have nothing cool and techy in the house."

Jane leaned across the table and smacked his arm with the menu, then handed it to Mike so he could pick out what he wanted. "If you keep embarrassing me the only friend I'll ever bring over again is Max." she told her father while Mike started reading.

"Oh so we'll just go back to normal?" he replied.

Once they all knew what they were getting Hopper called it in on the phone across the room. While he did Jane held onto Mike's hand under the table, her thumb brushing across his palm. Slowly but surely he could feel himself starting to relax. Hopper was surprisingly easy to talk to. And it was a nice change for Jane to be the one getting teased for once. They chatted for a little while before they all took his police car to pick up their food, Jane climbing into the back to keep him company.

As they pulled out of the driveway Jane reached for the car radio and tuned it in to a familiar station. "Will always puts on this station." He commented when she sat next to him again.

"Will has good taste in music."

The smell of the car on the ride back filled up the car and made their mouths water. Jane snatched the to go bag from her dad and flew into the kitchen, already getting out plates and utensils when they made their way in. Mike hadn't realized just how hungry he was until he stared eating. He supposed his nerves had affected his appetite more than he anticipated.

"So how'd you guys meet again?" Hopper asked after they were all a few bites in.

Mike felt his cheeks turning red and he didn't dare look over at Jane. "At a party."

"The one I went to with Max so she could talk to L- that one guy." Jane offered in hopes of getting her dad to remember.

"Oh yeah, right." He said in between bites. "You said it was a big party. How'd you manage to bump into each other?"

He was thankful Jane took on the responsibility to reply. "We were both in the basement to get away from the crowd. We just, you know, started talking."

"You know Max told me the *real* story, right?"

Jane replied with Mike's exact thoughts. "Oh."

Across the table he grinned at their embarrassment. "Relax, you two. I just think it's interesting that it never really comes up."

Oops.

"Everyone seems to think it's pretty interesting." Jane mumbled. "I'm gonna need the phone tonight to call my ex best friend."

Hopper only laughed and changed the subject by asking her about school.

Once he got over his embarrassment Mike managed to enjoy the rest of the meal. Jane was right, talking to her father was easy once he was no longer so intimidating. Though he wasn't a techy savvy person he seemed genuinely interested when Mike talked about the type of stuff he did in AV club when they actually worked. It also helped that he shared some familiar mannerisms as Jane. Like how they covered their mouths with their napkins when they laughed whether or not they were chewing. Or keeping the different food items separated on their plates.

After they ate he helped Jane wash the plates and put them away. "I should go soon." He told her when she handed him the last plate to dry. "I didn't tell my mom I was staying for dinner and I don't want her to call the cops or something."

She seemed as disappointed as he felt. "Well at least we'll be able to account for you if she does."

He put his books away in his backpack before heading for the front door, all with Jane following close behind. Mike watched her

curiously as she put on her shoes. "Going somewhere?"

"I'm gonna walk with you for a little while." She said simply. "It's a nice day."

It really wasn't. He had a hunch that she just wanted to spend some more time together, which he didn't object to at all.

Her hand slipped into his once they were on the street in front of his house. Something about touching Jane was so much better when she reached for him first. It made it harder for the irrational part of his brain to convince him that she didn't actually like him. The more time they spent together after Halloween the more comfortable and confident he felt with her.

"He's usually not that embarrassing." She assured him once they were a block or two away from the house. "I can't *believe* Max told him. I hope she didn't say that I was drunk."

"I hope she didn't say I was drunk either." Mike agreed.

She laughed, walking closer to him. "Do your parents know? I know you said Nancy does."

"Um..." he looked away from her, instead watching the sprinkler of a house they were passing by. "Don't take this the wrong way but I've never mentioned you to them before."

"Oh."

"Not because I'm embarrassed or keeping you a secret or anything." He quickly added. "It's just... I don't know. They're not super involved. And it's not just you. There's a lot of things about my life that they don't know."

He could picture her expression so clearly there was no need to look. Small frown, joined brows, crease in her forehead. "Why?"

"I don't know."

She stopped walking and pulled on his hand to get him to stop too. He reluctantly turned to face her, seeing the same expression on her

face he had pictured in his mind. "Come on, Mike." She said, her voice turning softer. "Tell me."

He shrugged his shoulders. "There's nothing really to tell." He told her. "My dad is... I don't know. And my mom is so busy with my baby sister that sometimes she just forgets to check in every once in a while." He could see the sympathy written all over her face and tried to think of something to say to make it disappear. "But it's okay. Nancy and I are pretty close. She's annoying enough to make up for both of them."

"Yeah but..." her voice trailed off as she tried to think of the words for her thoughts. "Don't you miss having quality time with them."

"Not really." He admitted. "You can't really miss something you never had, you know?"

Her expression only turned more sympathetic so he pulled on her hand to get her walking again.

Mike had never thought much about his relationship with his parents. Some kids were really close with their family and some weren't. It was just the way things went. At the end of the day Nancy could be a pain in the ass but he was thankful for her. She made the house less lonely. She gave him advice, whether he wanted her to or not, and made sure he was still eating and drinking when he spent all day in the basement watching movies back to back. Was she more of a mother than a sister? Perhaps. Either way he was glad he had her.

He could feel all of Jane's unanswered questions hanging in the air and was glad she kept them that way. It seemed ironic that someone with the family history he had got all sympathetic just because he and his parents weren't best friends. He was the one who should be worried about her. Mike could tell how worried she was when she stopped him several times on their walk just to kiss him or give him a hug.

Despite the fact that she had only intended to walk with him for a little while she ended up coming with him all the way to his house. They both had homework to do, and she had a phone call to make, so they both knew she couldn't stay. Still they lingered on his front

doorstep.

"You should come back over soon." She said. "I can tell he likes you. He only teases people that he likes."

Mike rolled his eyes. "Good to know."

"Or you can come over some time when he's not home?" she suggested. "You know, so he doesn't tease you."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Oh yeah." He said. "*That's* why you want me to come over when he's not home."

She grinned and pulled him towards her by his hand. "Okay, maybe it's not the *only* reason." Jane admitted. "It's more like top three."

"Well if you need someone to keep you company next time he works late you can call me."

"I *definitely* will."

She placed a not so quick on his lips, her hands landing on the back of his neck. He was well aware of both his parents cars in the driveway but found himself not caring if they saw or not. Mike wouldn't be able to see Jane until the next morning and he intended on enjoying his last few moments with her as much as he could. She pulled away before the kiss could get too heated and they said their reluctant goodbyes. Mike waited to go inside until she was halfway down his front lawn. The same front lawn where she'd told him she liked him. He went inside and went straight to Nancy's room, feeling less annoyed by her enthusiasm in his life after his talk with Jane.

## 14. You Don't Mess Around With Jane

I'm really excited about this chapter and I hope you guys like it as much as I do :)

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*December 7th 1988*

After getting a call from her dad that he would be working late yet again Jane had a crystal clear image on how the rest of her Thursday night would go. She would finish the last of her homework, order some crappy take-out food, and watch the same movies she always did. All while trying to keep herself from calling Mike and inviting him over. She would come close a few times, probably even go so far as to pick up the receiver but put it down only moments later in fear of being annoying. If she was really itching to talk to someone she was determined to call Max instead. She had been at Mike's house the day before after school and she didn't want him to get sick of her if they hung out too often.

It was nearing 5 pm when she dared to put in her tape of *Rocky Horror*, a movie she hadn't watched since Halloween. Her stomach filled with butterflies when she heard Brad Majors said the very same words Mike has said before kissing her at the Halloween party. She remembered how cute he had looked in the thick black glasses and messy hair. Over a month later and thinking of Halloween night made her into a blushy lovesick mess. Jane hummed along to the songs and hid her face in a pillow every time anything sexual happened as if someone were around to see how red her face got.

She and Max more often than not ended up talked about her status with Mike. It seemed to be a fascinating topic to her red haired friend. She couldn't quite wrap her mind around why Jane was scared to make things with him official. Try as Jane might to spell things out for her as clear as day she still didn't understand. Things with Mike were perfect. He was quickly turning into one of her best friends (of course Max held a special place in her heart that could never be replaced) and someone she cared for dangerously so. The more she fell for Mike the more scared she was. But it was hard to be scared when he looked at her like she was something really special. She

couldn't help but feel like something special around him.

The phone rang in the middle of the *Rose Tint My World* and she paused the movie to answer the call, the blanket she had on still wrapped around her shoulders. She hurried into the kitchen and leaned against the wall next to the phone before picking it up. Jane tried to suffocate the hope that it was Mike calling her to ask if she wanted to hang out. "Hello?"

"Yeah, hey, it's me." Her father said from the other line. "We're pretty busy here so I can't talk for long but I have to tell you something."

Her stomach sank all the way down to the tiled floor. If he couldn't talk long but called anyway it must have been something serious. "What is it?"

"A classmate of yours, Troy, has been brought in. He got into a really bad fight after school. We're waiting to see if the other kid is pressing charges while we hold him."

Jane's jaw was dropped open slack. Troy was a menace but he couldn't imagine him beating someone up so bad that he had to be taken into custody. Even if he didn't go to prison Jane knew for a fact he was sitting in the cell while they waited to see what to do with him. "Holy shit."

"Yeah, um, that's not all." Her father continued. "The kid he beat up was Mike."

Every drop of blood in her body went ice cold. Images of an injured Mike flooded through her brain and made her feel like she was drowning. "Mike? *Wheeler*?"

"Yeah."

"I-" her mind was moving a mile a minute, already halfway to the Wheeler's house. "I have to go. Thanks."

She hung up the phone without letting him get another word in and sprinted to her bedroom, leaving her blanket on the kitchen floor. Jane pulled on the first pair of sneakers and jacket she could find before grabbing her keys and running out the front door and to the

garage. It took her a moment to find her old bike that was stiff from not being used in years and was just a tad too small but she didn't care. She slammed the garage door shut and then she was off.

Jane was never an athletic person per say but she rode to Mike's house like she was in the tour de France. The only clear and coherent thought in her mind was that he was *hurt*. The rest of her thoughts were a jumbled an anxious mess. Why had Troy beat him up in the first place? How badly was he hurt? Who had called the police? Was Mike at the hospital? Was he okay? Please be okay please be okay *please*.

Every so often something would happen and she would be struck by just how much she cared for Mike. Like when he insisted on standing between her and the road when they were walking around town. Or how he explained the same math problem over to her three times in a row just because she didn't get it. Or when she could see just how much he struggled to keep her hands off her when they were around their friends. Not that they didn't know something was going on between them. Neither of them were crazy about the idea of kissing in front of the very same people who teased them so much.

After finding out that Mike was hurt her feelings were so hard to ignore it was like they'd walked up to her and punched her square in the face. Her body ached to be close to him, her eyes burning to see him. Every cell in her body screamed that she needed him by her side. The L word was perhaps the scariest word in the English language. But she felt tears burning in her eyes when she imagined the boy she might L word being a bloody and hurt mess.

When she reached the house she practically threw her bike down on the ground and ran up to the front door, pressing her finger on the doorbell five times in a row just to get the point across that she was in a rush. She only had to wait a few moments for the door to open and for her eyes to land on Nancy.

She took one look at Jane before stepping to the side. "He's in his room."

Jane muttered a quick thanks before hurrying inside and taking the steps two at a time. Her heart pounded so hard it threatened to burst



out of her chest as she approached his room. She made it to the doorway and was frozen in place when her eyes landed on Mike sitting with his back against his headboard. He was wrapping an ice pack in a towel and there were a few drops of blood on his shirt. There were cuts and bruises scattered across his face, the two biggest ones being on his chin and his forehead. His face was screwed up into a wince before he noticed her standing there and his eyes went wide.

"What are you doing here?" he blurted, laying the ice pack on his hand.

"I-" her voice faltered as she did another once over of his face. She felt anger swell up inside her chest and she wished Troy were nearby so she could hurt him like he had hurt Mike. But she swallowed the feeling down, reminding herself that Mike was in front of her and he was the one that mattered. "My dad called me. Troy's at the station."

"Oh."

Her feet carried her over to him on her own accord, as if her body craved to be near him while her mind was still working in slow motion. Every single cut and bruise on his perfect face made her heart crack and she wanted to wipe them all away. "What happened?"

Underneath a bruise on his cheekbone she saw his face go red. "I don't wanna tell you."

"Why?"

"Because you're gonna feel bad."

Jane sat down on the bed next to him. Her hands craved to touch him so she kept them locked between her thighs. She didn't know if both his hands were hurt and she didn't want to make him feel worse. "If you don't tell me then I'll sneak into my dad's office and read the police report." She told him. "Can't you just save me the trouble?"

Mike groaned and leaned his head back against the headboard, closing his eyes. "Okay, fine." He said, though he didn't at all sound pleased to tell her. "We were leaving AV club and I heard him talking about you. He was probably just trying to bother me but... I got

really mad. He was saying really awful things."

"Like what?"

He shook his head. "I'm not telling you. You don't have to hear stuff like that."

Jane sighed, her curiosity urging her to pester him more but she managed to hold back. "Okay, what happened then?"

"I told him to shut up but he just kept going. So I pushed him into the lockers. Then he pushed me back so I punched him." Mike glanced at Jane and let out a groan when he saw her shocked expression. "Will ran to the payphone to call the cops and we were still going at it when they got there. They took two cars so your dad gave me a ride home."

Jane inched closer to him, tentatively reaching for his hand that didn't seem to be hurt. He met her halfway and laced his fingers through hers. "Mike what the *hell* were you thinking?"

He raised one eyebrow at her, the one that didn't have a cut right above it. "Should I have just let him talk about you like that?"

"Yes!" She said. "People talk about me all the time, Mike. What are you gonna do? Beat up every person who looks at me the wrong way?"

He rolled his eyes. "No, of course not."

"You know how Troy is." She continued. "What did you expect, you would tell him to shut up and he would go 'oh, shit, you're right. I shouldn't talk about women that way.'"

She watched him squeeze his eyes shut and tilt his head back. Jane waited for him to reply longer than she had expected to. "Can we put off fighting until I don't have dried blood on my face."

Jane pulled her hand back, feeling her heart stop for a moment. She stared at him for a moment and tried to stop her bottom lip from shaking. When she felt a burn in her throat she jumped to her feet and blurted "I'll be right back" before rushing into the bathroom

down the hall.

She closed the door and leaned her back against it, taking deep breaths in through her nose. She felt like a fool. The whole point of not making this official and serious with Mike was to avoid things like fighting and tension. And of course the day she realized just how much she truly cared about him she went and picked a fight with him. Her heart pounded at her racing thoughts. What if he broke things off with her? What if he got tired of her getting scared and pushing him away every other week? What if he was sick of not being official and gave up on her all together? What if what if what if? She angrily wiped at her eyes with her jacket sleeves and tried to keep her crying noises to a minimum.

Jane glared at herself in the mirror and wondered to herself if she was completely messing things up by keeping Mike at arms distance. She had let him in on more than she ever expected to when she decided the day after they met that he was someone she wanted to call a friend. He knew things about her family and her life from Chicago that she had been tight lipped about since her move to Hawkins. Yet despite how much he knew there was still so much she hid from him. Telling him about things that had happened to her was the easy part. But talking about her feelings, specifically how he made her feel, was what she struggled with.

She made it plain as day how much she cared about him through her actions. How she begged and pleaded with him to just be a little bit later to home room to spend some more time with her. How she struggled to keep the distance between them around their friends just as much as he did. How, try as she might to spend time away from him and not become dependent on his touch, she always ended up asking him to hang out the next day. It was words that she struggled with. Articulating just how she felt about him was something far too vulnerable for her. Though she knew he deserved to hear it she couldn't made herself say this.

A small knock from the other side of the door interrupted her train of thoughts and made her straighten up. "Jane?" Mike asked, his voice sounding hesitant. "You okay?"

"Yeah, uh, I'm fine. I'm fine." Though it was clear by the shakiness of

her words that she was crying. She cringed slightly at the sound of her own voice.

She heard him sigh quietly. "Look, I'm sorry. I don't wanna fight. I'm really happy you're here. Please come out?"

Jane glanced in the mirror and wiped at her cheeks one last time before opening the door. Though it was pretty clear she still looked like she was crying by the look on his face. "*I* snapped at *you*." She pointed out. "Why are you sorry?"

"I shouldn't have told you what happened." He said. "I knew it would upset you."

"You absolutely should have told me." she countered. "I just reacted like a crazy person. You stood up for me and I'm getting mad at you."

He reached for her hand with his that wasn't cut up from throwing punches and hooked his pointer finger with hers. "We okay?"

Jane felt her bottom lip start to shake again so she quickly pulled him into a hug before she could start crying again. "Yeah. We're okay."

Mike held onto her like he never wanted to let her go. And she didn't want him to. She spent so much of her time feeling average and unimportant. But it was hard to not feel at least a little bit special around Mike Wheeler, who listened with absolute attention and cared fiercely. She pulled away just enough to press kisses onto his face, all around the spots where he was hurt but being careful not to touch them directly. Jane wished she could kiss away all his pain, not just the ones on the surface. As much as he listened to her talk about hard things he hardly ever shared some himself. But she knew there was something in there he was hiding from her. She planned on waiting patiently for him to show it to her.

They went back to his room after a few minutes, Mike closing the door behind him. She insisted that he lay down and not tire himself out and he very clearly left room for her beside him. How could she refuse? He lay the blankets over both of them once she was on her side facing him. It was an amazing feeling to be in the very spot he spent about 50% of a 24 hour day in. She wondered if he had ever

lay awake in the middle of the night thinking of her. She had certainly done the same for him.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked her. It was a question they often used when they wanted to talk but didn't know what to say. Something she and her dad had used often in the early days of the adoption.

"You." She answered, wrapping her arms around his waist and pulling him closer. Not that they could get much closer since they were laying in a twin sized bed. "I hope all those cuts heal quick because you're way too handsome to have them there for any long."

He rolled his eyes at her. "It'll probably be about a week. They aren't very deep."

She tilted her head up to see him better. "Are you gonna be in school tomorrow?"

Mike shrugged, his arms moving against her. "Maybe. It all depends on how my hand is in the morning. If I can't write than the only point in going tomorrow would be to spend time with you."

"Then don't go." She told him. "I'll come by after school tomorrow whether you want me to or not."

"I absolutely want you to."

Jane grinned at him, squeezing him tighter. "Troy better hope they keep him in lockup overnight because if I see him in school tomorrow I'm gonna kick his ass."

Mike made a face at her. "Don't."

"I'll still wear my steel toed boots tomorrow just in case."

She stayed at Mike's house for another hour or so, checking and double checking he was okay before she left and making him promise to call her after he finished eating dinner. Her body felt heavy as she made her way to her discarded bike on his front lawn. She knew she couldn't just sit at home worrying about him for the rest of the night so instead she biked to Max's house, the route even more familiar

than the one to Mike's. Jane was thankful that Billy's car wasn't in the driveway since she could bang on the front door as loud as she pleased.

Max appeared in the doorway with a scowl that melted when she saw Jane standing on the porch. "You heard what happened to Mike?" she asked instead of a greeting.

Jane nodded. "Wanna drive me to the police station?"

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The police station was just as busy as she expected it to be. They were understaffed by three people so almost everyone was working overtime just to keep the building from burning down. No one noticed as Jane and Max wondered into her dad's office which was, of course, unlocked. The room was just as messy as it had been the last time she was there. They both searched through the countless files on his desk for the incident report that had likely already been written up.

"I found it!" Jane announced, picking up the file and reading out loud.

*"Wheeler overheard Harrington talking about a friend of his and approached him to tell him to stop. Harrington continued to degrade the friend so Wheeler pushed him into the lockers. Wheeler delivered two punches before Harrington grabbed him in the shirt and started punching back. Witnesses say Harrington delivered up to eight punches before they went to call the police. When officers arrived on the scene Wheeler was on the ground and Harrington was kicking him in the stomach and had to be pulled away by two officers. Wheelers wounds were mostly superficial so he was taken home while Harrington was taken into custody for further questioning on the situation. Neither Wheeler or any witnesses have revealed what Harrington said to start the fight."*

Jane set the file down on the desk again and for a moment her and Max stared wordlessly at each other. The report gave her much more information than Mike had and she was able to come up with a play by play of the confrontation in her head. She winced as she imagined the sight on Mike on the floor getting kicked in the stomach. He certainly hadn't brought that injury up when she'd been at his house.

"Man." Max said, being the first to break the silence. "He's totally in love with you."

If she wasn't so speechless she would have blushed.

Her shock eventually wore off and she was soon storming out of the office and down the hall to the holding cells with Max close behind. There were three cells and the two next to Troy's were empty, which she was thankful for. She swelled with pride at the sight of his busted lip and the knowledge that Mike had given it to him. Simply because he had said bad things about her. At the sight of her and Max coming in Troy jumped to his feet and stood as far away from them as he could in the confined space.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Jane didn't listen to him as she pulled a bobby pin out of her hair and used it to pick the lock. A small voice in the back of her mind told her she needed to watch herself. There was only so much trouble her dad could bail her out of. But the words in the incident report circled around her mind and it was hard to think clearly. Jane had an embarrassing amount of experience with picking locks but she was thankful for it when the cell opened with ease. As she stepped into the cell Max wandered over towards the end of the hall to serve as lookout.

Troy's shock at her presence gave her the advantage to grab him by the shirt and slam him against the bars. He was almost as tall as Mike and built like a football player while Jane was barely over 5 foot and could lift 25 pounds maximum. But she detected a flicker of fear behind his expression that he managed to cover almost instantly. Still, she hadn't missed it.

She got closer to Troy than she had ever imagined being. "If you *ever* touch a hair on Mike Wheeler's head I will make you sorry you ever met him." she growled. "Got it?"

He hesitated only a moment longer than he likely meant to. "I really hope you're putting out for him after the ass whooping he got for you."

Jane brought her leg up and connected her knee with his crotch with all her force. He doubled over in pain but she forced him upright again. "You spread that rumor about me that I spent six months in jail, right? I'll do it for real if I ever see you even look at him the wrong way."

"I got no clue what he sees in a crazy bitch like you."

Normally such words would dig up some of her insecurities and make her cry once she was alone in her room. But they bounced harmlessly off her. "Damn right I'm a crazy bitch. Don't you forget it."

She slammed him against the bars one last time before letting go of his shirt and walking out of the cell, pushing the door shut with a satisfying clink. Jane turned towards Max who wore a face of shock and pride all at the same time. They hurried out of the station before anyone could see them (just in case Troy told someone what happened) and ran through the parking lot to Max's mom's car. Once they were sitting they burst out laughing at the look on Troy's face when they had walked in. It was a mental image Jane would cherish forever.

"Man," Max said as she backed out of the parking space. "You're totally in love with him."

Totally and completely.



## 15. Mike Wheeler Makes the Fall

Surprise! Another Jane chapter (or half chapter)!

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As soon as the eighth period bell rang Jane slammed her notebook closed and rushed to her locker. Something about the school day was especially painful when she knew Mike wasn't in the building. Between every class she kept her eyes peeled for him before she ultimately remembered he was at home and sulked the rest of her way to class. Lunch was especially painful. They didn't even have the same lunch period to begin with, but it gave her 45 minutes to really think. And, as they did every time she had free time, her thoughts drifted to her dark haired not-boyfriend.

"Okay, did I miss something?" Max had asked halfway through her egg salad. "Did you guys break up yesterday or something?"

"No."

Max threw her hands up in the air. "Then why are you so *sad* looking?"

"Because I *miss* him!" she said. "I've seen him in school every day since Jennifer Hayes' party. And I even gave up coffee after we started-..."

Max raised an eyebrow on her forehead. "Excuse me? Started *what*?"

There was no way Jane was about to reveal that she had ditched her morning coffee after she and Mike started getting to school early to meet up in the AV room every morning before classes. There was no need for coffee after a pick me up like that.

"Nothing." she grumbled instead. "I just miss him okay?"

Jane practically sprinted through the halls to her locker once classes were over. She had a care package ready and waiting to be brought to his house. For the first time since 6th grade she had biked to school, knowing that it would allow her to get to Mike's faster. The

usual 25 minute walk would only take 15. She was so busy stuffing her books in her locker to make room in her bag that she hadn't noticed Will approaching until he was standing right next to her.

"You're going to Mike's, right?"

"Yep." She said, pulling a large paper shopping bag out of his locker and showing it to him. "I'm bringing him this."

Will took his backpack off and started digging through it. "I have something to give him too, but I'm going to the dentist so I don't have time to give it to him myself. Can you give it to him for me?"

"Yeah of course."

He handed her a plastic bag and she couldn't help but sneak a look inside at the assortment of candies and snacks. "Someone's gotta eat sweets for me since I can't anymore." He explained when she put it in her own gift bag.

They walked side by side to the front door. It certainly wasn't the same as walking with Mike, but out of all the boys she got along with Will the second best. They had more in common than just their music taste.

"Not that it's not obvious or anything," Will said as they pushed the front doors open, "but it really means a lot to him that you care so much."

She felt her eyebrows furrow together. "Why wouldn't I?"

"He's just not used to people caring is all."

Jane stopped in front of her bike, her hand on the handlebars and her confused expression only worsening. "What does that mean?"

Will unlocked his bike and rolled it out onto the pavement. "I probably shouldn't tell you. It's about his parents. Just forget I said anything."

She hopped on her bike and hurried to catch up with him. "Well he already told me a little bit about his parents so I think it's okay."

"What did he tell you?"

Jane thought back to the night she had walked him home from her house. She got the same twisted stomach feeling when she thought about the little glimpse she had gotten into his home life. "Well he said he never told his parents about me. And that there's a lot of things about his life they don't know. That his mom forgets to check in sometimes but that it's okay because he and Nancy are really close."

She glanced over at Will who seemed to be biting the inside of his cheek. "It's a bit more than that." He said.

"Tell me. Please."

He let out a sigh as they started biking on the road. Jane prayed that they wouldn't have to part soon so she could get as much information as possible. "Mike's father is the only one in the family who works. He burns himself out every day so by the time he gets home he's too tired to pay his kids any attention. And Mrs. Wheeler is... how do I put this?" he fell silent for a few moments. "Nancy excelled not only at school but at socializing. Their mom was always driving her to some sort of practice or recital. Mike kind of got put in her shadow."

"Then Holly was born when we were ten I think? After that it was like neither Mike or Nancy existed. Nancy got a lot of friends to make up for it but Mike only ever had us. He practically lived at my house in eighth grade because my mom is really cool. She asks me about Mike more than his own mom does, I think."

"Wow."

"It's hard for him when he cares about people and they don't care back. Especially because he cares hard. That's why I was a little nervous when you guys started hanging out and getting, you know, involved."

It was no longer a secret to the rest of the group that they were together. Did they understand? Not quite. Did they tease them? Mercilessly. But not unless she or Mike did something in front of them. If they were able to keep the distance between each other it

was like nothing was going on. She expected them to be confused by their lack of label. But she never expected them to be *nervous*. "Why?"

"Mike really likes you. I mean *really* likes you. Don't tell him I told you that." They both laughed a little bit. "He told me that you guys weren't going to be official, which you kind of are but whatever, and I got scared because I didn't know how he would take it. Mike's really insecure about the way people feel about him. And when he gets insecure he over thinks, and when he over thinks he starts acting stupid and self sabotages things. Back in freshman year he pushed us away so bad that he didn't come to school for a week because he didn't want to see us."

"Wow." She said again.

"Yeah but he hasn't done that with you. At least I don't think so."

"No, he hasn't." she agreed. "But I tell him all the time that I care about him. It's just that putting a label on things really scares me. And when I get scared I get kind of crazy."

"You can't be that bad."

Jane snorted. "You didn't know me in Chicago."

"Well either way I was pleasantly surprised with how good you guys are." Will said, slowly down as they got to a fork in the road. She could see him drifting left while she drifted right. "See you tomorrow?"

She bit her tongue from asking more questions. Jane had learned more about the way Mike's mind worked in a 10 minute conversation with Will than she had in the two months that she'd known him. She was craving to know more, to understand him better. Instead she forced a smile on her face. "Yeah, see ya."

Jane decided to stop at her house before going to Mike's. A last minute addition to the care package had popped in her mind, and she figured if she was ever going to give away her prized possession she might as well give it to him.

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Anticipating Jane's arrival Mike moved to sit on the couch a little after 3. He'd been home alone all day since his mom took Holly to a play date and Nancy had class. Normally he would have spent the whole day waiting for Jane, unable to think of anything else. But the pain in his hand and scattered across his face was a good distraction. He had practiced writing to prepare himself for going back to school the next day and had managed to write another train of thought underneath the one about Jane from Halloween weekend.

He was wrapped up in a blanket on the couch flipping mindlessly through the channels when he heard the doorbell ring. Mike jumped up to his feet and struggled not to hurry to answer so he wouldn't seem desperate. When he finally opened the door he only got to look at Jane for a second before she threw her arms around his neck and her lips crashed against his own.

It wasn't uncommon for Jane to make the first move when they were together. But she never seemed so eager. Usually they talked for a minute or two before her hand met his. The kissing then came shortly after. Neither of them had even said a word to each other and her lips were already parting against his own. It was pretty out of character. Was she trying to soften the blow before giving him some bad news?

His paranoia got the best of him and he pulled away from her. "What's wrong?"

She shook her head. "Nothing's wrong." Jane said as if it was obvious. Maybe it was. "I just missed you." She shrugged off her backpack before pulling him into the living room. "I brought you something." They sat facing each other while Jane pulled a large bag out of her backpack. He opened his mouth to protest but she seemed to have read his mind. "Don't you dare. I wanted to get you something. There's stuff in there from Will too so it's not just me."

Along with more snacks than had ever been in his house at one time the bag was full of small items to keep him busy. But the one thing he certainly didn't expect to pull out of the bag was a tattered copy of *the Great Gatsby*. He shook his head, "I can't take your favorite book."

"I want you to." She said, fiddling with the wrapper of a candy he let

her have. "It's old. I was planning on getting a new copy anyway."

Mike flipped through the pages and immediately noticed that there were highlighted lines and written notes in the margin of almost every single page. He stopped on one at random, curious as to what she would have written inside the book. His eyes were drawn to a highlighted line halfway down the page. "He looked at her the way all women want to be looked at by a man." Just off to the side was a note in her hand writing written in black pen. *Mike*. He felt his face catch on fire and decided he couldn't help himself.

Mike flipped through more of the pages, once again stopping at random. Several lines on the page he stopped on were highlighted but he focused on one towards the bottom of the page. "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him." Next to it was another note made by Jane. *I would pay all the money in the world to have my eyes crafted into a mirror so he could see himself how I do. He is remarkable and extraordinary and everything I wish I could be.*

It was that very moment that Mike Wheeler made the fall. He could feel his body sinking down into the couch while his heart made a one-way journey. It packed up its things and jumped out of his chest, wandering over to Jane Hopper and offering itself up to be totally and completely hers for the rest of its life. He expected to feel empty afterwards. After all his own heart no longer belonged to him. But instead he felt more complete than he had ever felt. He was sure he had learned the meaning of life. Or at least his life. It had dark curly hair and wore all black. It sang badly in the car and didn't care one bit. It talked about literature in a way that made him want to write a book just for it. It was sitting in front of him.

Without a word Mike moved the things she had brought him onto the floor and pulled him into his arms. She scooted closer to him and rested her head on his shoulder while her arms wrapped around his waist. He gripped her tightly, feeling dizzy from the fall and using her to keep him grounded. Mike closed his eyes and let out a quiet, content sigh. He was sure that she didn't have the same level of feelings for him that he did for her. But he did know she felt something. It was all he could really ask for.

"Thank you." He said, pressing a kiss on the side of her head.

"Of course."

When they pulled away from each other she helped him put his gifts in the bag again and bring them up to his room. Their footsteps echoed through the empty house. It wasn't often that he was alone in the house, at least not literally. Most of the time when he was alone with Jane they were in a private room with people close by. He felt a familiar giddiness, similarly to how he felt when they'd been alone in his basement after Halloween.

He put his care package on his desk while Jane dropped her backpack on the floor. "When does Nancy get home?" she asked as she wandered over to his bed.

"A little after 6 usually." Mike lingered by his desk, his eyes fixed on the carpet. "My mom gets home at 5:30 though."

"Okay."

"Do you, uh..." He shifted his weight from one leg to the other. "Do you wanna meet her?"

He could feel the air shift with her surprise. "Really?" she asked after a moment. "Are you sure?"

Mike shrugged his shoulder, messing with the handle of the paper bag. "Yeah, I think so." He said. "I mentioned you the other day at dinner and she said she wanted to meet you so... do you wanna meet her?"

Jane jumped up from the bed and went to stand next to him. "You were talking about me?" she asked, her eyebrow raising high on her forehead. "What did you say?"

He instantly regretted bringing it up at all. Was introducing her to his mom to much of a relationship-y thing to do? Was it going to scare her off? "Um... I just said that we've been hanging out a lot and that you were really cool. She said I should invite you over for dinner sometime so, I don't know, I thought maybe tonight would be okay. But if not-"

"Mike." She said, cutting him off and putting her hands on his shoulders. "I would really like to stay for dinner and meet your family."

"Oh." He couldn't help but smile a little, some of his worries disappearing. The paranoid part of him that was convinced she was lying had a hard time speaking up when she said it so earnestly. "Okay. Cool."

She grinned back at him, her hands sliding down his arms until her fingers were laced with his. "Cool." She agreed.

Jane stood on her toes and pressed her lips against his. When they got together Mike had assumed that eventually the spark of electricity that shot through his body when she kissed him would die down. But it had yet to even dim. Mike reached behind him to close his bedroom door despite the fact that they were home alone. It was a habit of his. She wrapped her arms around his neck to keep him in place, as if he were planning on going anywhere. One thing he was definitely thankful for was that he hadn't been punched in the lip. He didn't think he would have survived not being able to kiss her until she healed.

He hardly noticed the little steps backwards she took until the back of her legs hit his bed. Her grip on his neck tightened as she lay flat on her back so she could bring him down with her. The only clear thought running through his mind was that they were home alone. With no chance of getting walked in on for another hour and a half he didn't know how he'd be able to push her away. He mentally crossed his fingers that she would do him the favor of being the one with self control.

Mike trailed kisses down her jaw but could only go so low since she still had her jacket on. As soon as the thought entered his mind her hands disappeared from his shoulders to unzip her outer layer. She sat up just enough to shrug it off and toss it onto the floor a few feet away. Once she was on her back again he resumed where he'd left off. She had done him the favor of wearing a v-neck shirt that day and he was suddenly glad he hadn't gone to school. There was no way he would have been able to focus on anything knowing she was nearby wearing something so enticing.



He reminded himself too late that as of last week she was hickey free for the first time since Halloween. Mike pulled away from her and winced at the bright red mark now on her collarbone. "Sorry." He said half heartedly.

"It's okay." She said. There was no better sound in the world than Jane's voice when and after they made out. Almost out of breath and always quiet enough that even if someone was nearby only he would be able to hear. Like her words were only for him. "I want them."

Her words took him by surprise for a moment. Neither of them were super direct when it came to time they had alone. They usually communicated specifically through body language. He knew she liked them after a couple times when she had her fingers in his hair to keep him in place until she was covered in red spots. But hearing her say it out loud was an entirely different experience.

"Okay." Was all he managed to articulate from that train of thought.

Jane picked her head up to look at her watch, the corners of her lips twitching up when she looked at him again. "It's only 4."

"Okay."

"Your mom gets home at 5:30."

"Yeah." His mush turned mind was moving in slow motion.

"So we have an hour and a half alone." Her eyes scanned his face for any sign that he understood what she was saying. Which he obviously didn't. She groaned and covered her eyes with her hands, her cheeks turning an adorable shade of pink. "Okay. What I'm trying to say is, ugh... doyouwannahavesexwithme?"

His slow motion mind just barely managed to catch what she had said. It wasn't as if he'd never thought about it (because he certainly had. Many times). It just never seemed to happen. When they did manage to get time alone in an empty house there usually wasn't enough time. One of them always pulled away before things got too hot and heavy and then it was over. Usually it was Mike. He was constantly tip toeing around his fear of pushing her too hard and to

out of her comfort zone. And something like *that* was a big deal.

He also never really thought she wanted to, more thanks to his own mind rather than her actions. Mike was convinced that eventually she would get tired of him and move on. Despite how badly she could break his heart he didn't want to be her first (despite the fact that she'd had a boyfriend before he knew they'd never gone that far. She told him when they met that she'd never kissed anyone before so he wasn't quite sure how that worked) and have her regret it. But hearing her say, plain as day, that she wanted him was like living in a dream.

His brain was too mush to even speak so he instead leaned down and kissed her again. He could feel her smiling against his lips and he knew that she meant it.

## 16. Jane Hopper Makes the Fall

Back at it again with a Jane chapter! This will probably be the last one (unless you guys are really enjoying her POV). I felt like I kind of had to make this chapter from her perspective since I'm a girl and there's really only so much of the male body and mind that I can experience and portray. Enjoy!

don't read this if you don't want smut

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Jane simply adored Mike. But sometimes he was so fucking *clueless*. Did he not understand that he was always the one to pull away and that if it was up to her they would have done it back in November? She hadn't actually wanted to watch *Dirty Dancing* while they waited *two hours* for her dad to get home. Two hours of her life had been wasted giving him every sign she could think of until she finally gave up and just watched the damn movie.

She covered her eyes with her hands. There was no way she could look at him if she had to spell it out. Jane wished, not for the first time, that Mike was a mind reader. That way she wouldn't have to be so blunt and up front. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, not just from being kissed the way she just had.

She took a breath in through her nose. "Okay. What I'm trying to say is, ugh...." *I can't do it I can't do it I can't do it.* "Doyouwannahavesexwithme?"

Jane wished Mike's bed could transform into a black hole and swallow her up and wait a month or two to spit her back out. She was already planning her escape for when he said no. Knowing her she would end up jumping out the bathroom window and running to her bike. The jump from the second floor to the ground would be a cake walk compared to the unbearable idea of facing Mike after a rejection like that.

She felt his hands wrap around her wrists and pull her eyes away from her face. Jane only got the opportunity to look at him and try to read his expression for a second before his lips were on hers again.

She let out a small sigh of relief into his mouth, taking his actions as a silent "yes". Had it been that easy all along? She couldn't help but feel a bit silly that she hadn't just spoken up earlier. Sometimes Mike seemed to be able to tell what she was thinking just by looking at her. Other times she could have written it out on a sign and waved it in front of his face and he would have been none the wiser.

Jane put his hands on his chest and pushed him until they were both sitting up. Her eyes weren't quite able to meet his when she grabbed onto the hem of her shirt and yanked it over her head before she could lose the courage. She could feel his eyes looking her over, her skin tingling in the way it always did when being watched. For a handful of seconds she felt incredibly insecure. Mike was easily the most attractive person she'd ever met. She felt boring and plain in comparison. But when those seconds passed and he kissed her again she could tell he would have disagreed.

Her hands tugged at his shirt in a silent request for him to discard it. Jane's stomach did a backflip when he took it off in that way boys did that was the hottest thing she had ever seen. One of his hands found the small of her back as she lay back down while he started kissing her neck again. She was always able to tell that he tried not to leave a mark on her, despite how unsuccessful he always was. For the first time it seemed he didn't care how bruised her skin would be in a few hours. Jane squeezed her eyes shut and bit down on her bottom lip, trying not to show how pathetically turned on she already was. Mike's touch was addictive and she wished she could feel his hands on her for the rest of her life.

He ran his tongue along the marks he had left scattered across her neck and collarbone, her nails involuntarily digging into his back. Jane couldn't believe she had ever tried to fool herself into thinking she could just be friends with him. There was no way she would have been able to live the rest of her life having only kissed Mike Wheeler once. Especially when the kiss in Jennifer Hayes' basement was nothing compared to what he was capable of making her feel.

His lips left her neck and she was immediately disappointed. "Are you sure about this?" he asked, his breath tickling her shoulder and making her shiver slightly.

"I've been sure since November, Mike."

He propped himself up so he could look at her, his eyebrows high on his forehead and his eyes. "Seriously?" Jane simply nodded her head. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Her face turned ever redder than it had already been. "Well I tried to." She said. "I just thought you were pretending not to notice because you didn't want to."

His eyes searched her red face, likely to see if she was kidding. "I promise I had no idea." He told her. "I'm an idiot."

Jane laughed, wrapping her arms around his neck. "You're not an idiot. You're just... a little clueless sometimes."

"More like all the time." He corrected.

"Just kiss me."

Mike offered up no protest and closed the distance between them. His kisses were sloppier than usual and she was having even more difficulty containing the noises that were stuck in her throat. Her whole body was on fire and she was torn between wanting to hurry up and get to the good part or to take their time since they had an hour and a half to themselves.

In the past few days the universe had been throwing her continuous curveballs that made it harder to deny how much she really cared for Mike. After hearing everything Will had said only an hour before, how Mike could be insecure about people actually caring him, she wanted nothing more than to show him just how much he meant to her. That she wanted only him and couldn't imagine feeling any different any time soon. Saying the words she knew she felt were terrifying but she was closer to saying them than ever.

She flipped them over so that she was on top and able to trail kisses down his neck. The words echoed in her head every time her lips touched his skin. *I love you*. She wished she could just be normal for once and spit it out. But she knew how much 3 words could change a relationship and things with Mike were perfect the way they were.

She grabbed his hands and placed them on her waist so that she would be able to stop thinking so much for once.

There were certain things Mike did when they made out that she had grown used to. He was always the one kissing her, likely so that it would be easier for him to pull away from her the way he always did eventually. And she knew he always tried to how turned on he was, his hips always carefully positioned so she wouldn't feel. But when she straddled his waist and licked and sucked on his neck he seemed to give up on hiding. His hips grinded against hers just barely but *holy shit*.

Jane sat up, suddenly deciding that it was best to hurry up and get to the good part. Her fingers started to shake in anticipation as she reached for the button of his jeans and she hoped he wouldn't notice. She didn't have the courage to check so she simply hoped. He helped her take off his jeans, which she was thankful for since she wasn't sure she had the coordination to do it by herself, until he kicked them off to the floor. She hardly got the chance to stare (which was disappointing) before he grabbed her by the waist and flipped her over so she was on her back and he was once again on top of her.

If he was nervous he didn't show it. He undid the button of her jeans and tugged them off like he had done it a million times before. She was glad that the window on the other side of the room was cracked open because she was sure the cold December air was the only thing keeping her body from catching on fire. After tossing her jeans on the floor next to his he was once again propped up above her, pressing sloppy kisses on her lips. With his waist between her knees he started grinding against her again. A series of moans of varying volume escaped her lips and disappeared into his mouth.

One of his hands reached around her back, his fingers fumbling with her bra clasp. She was just beginning to consider sitting up and helping him when she felt it come undone. Jane shrugged it off and tossed it across the room with the rest of their clothes. Mike started kissing and licking the newly exposed skin and she squirmed underneath him.

"Jesus Christ, Jane." He mumbled against her skin.

"Hm?"

"You're so fucking beautiful."

She bit down on her bottom lip as her face broke out in an ear to ear grin. Jane was seriously whipped.

Mike was still running his tongue along her skin when she felt his fingers hook inside her underwear before he started pulling them off. Her heart was hammering in her chest so hard there was no way he didn't hear it. Mike's hands went higher up her thighs and getting closer to her core until she was sure the anticipation alone would kill her. She was on the verge of begging when he finally slipped one of his fingers inside her. A half moan- half shout escaped her and she quickly clapped a hand over her mouth.

He reached up and grabbed her hand, pulling it away from her mouth. "I wanna hear."

*Oh my god.*

She didn't need to be told twice. Even if she wanted to be quiet she knew there was no point as soon as he started pumping his finger inside her. She was only just beginning to get used to the feeling when he added another, earning another moan from her. He pressed kisses on her inner thigh and even left a hickey or two. She could feel him mumbling something against her skin but she couldn't hear whatever he was saying over her own voice. Her hand tightly gripped onto the one that wasn't inside her while she squirmed and grinded against him.

"Oh my god Mike!" she hardly cared if she was loud enough for her voice to carry out the open window. She wished the whole world could know how completely amazing and wonderful he was.

"Is it okay?"

*Was that a joke?* "I love it. I love it." She tugged on his hand, feeling the nail marks she had made on his palm. If she had hurt him he wasn't complaining. "I want you so bad Mike."

Her bottom lip stuck out and she audibly whined when he pulled his

fingers out. He leaned over to her and reached into his nightstand drawer and pulled out a condom. Protection hadn't even occurred to her and she was glad he was prepared since she hadn't thrown one into her care package. She felt her eyes go wide when he pulled off his boxers and threw them on the floor. Jane had always heard that the first time hurt, but she never really cared very much. It couldn't hurt more than that time she got into a fist fight the summer before she moved to Hawkins and got her nose broken. But how the hell was *that* supposed to fit and not hurt?

Mike must have seen something in her face when his eyebrows shot up. "What?"

"Nothing." she lied, way too quickly and way too defensively.

He nudged her leg. "Come on."

Her whole body was throbbing and she didn't have the brain power to lie or change the subject. "I just..." she said, her voice stuttering and sounding slightly shaky. "Surprised." *God I sound like an idiot.*

She could see him trying to hold back a smile and she suddenly felt a little bit less embarrassed. As long as it made him feel good she didn't care.

Jane looked up at the ceiling and sucked a deep breath in through her nose while he tore the wrapper open. Through her lust filled haze she wondered how bad it would hurt. Was the rumor that girls bled the first time true? She made a mental note to buy him a new set of bedsheets on her way home or after school the next day.

"Are you nervous?"

She opened her eyes to peek at him and instantly felt her heart swell. His face was flushed bright red and his lips were swollen from repeated kisses. His hair was a mess thanks to her tugging at it while he had kissed her neck. Not to mention that he was totally hard. She had done that. There wasn't a doubt in her mind that she loved him more than she'd ever loved anyone. She wished he could just stare at her hard enough and see exactly how she felt so she wouldn't have to say it.



"No." She said. "Not with you."

The smile he had been trying to hold back broke out in a grin matching hers. The quote she knew he has seen from Gatsby echoed in her head. "He looked at her the way all women want to be looked at by a man." It was like the sentence had been written about Mike. She never wanted anyone but him to look at her like that.

He unrolled the condom onto himself and she felt stupid for missing the opportunity to do it for him. *Next time*. Mike propped himself up over her again and she bit down on her lower lip, having no clue what to expect. She felt his tip rubbing against her and her desire for him overcame her anxiety. Jane nodded, too scared to open her mouth in case a sound of pain came out. If she knew Mike as well as he did he would put on the brakes if he thought he was hurting her and she certainly didn't want that. His forehead pressed against her shoulder as he pushed himself inside her. Her expression screwed up in pain and she was thankful he didn't see. It was far from the worst pain she had ever felt. Still it definitely stung.

"Does it hurt?" he asked, his breath hot on her neck.

"Stop worrying." She told him, wrapping his arms around his waist in case he planned on pulling away from her. "I want this, Mike."

He whispered in her ear promises to be gentle and pressed sloppy kisses against her neck. He moved slowly at first, allowing her body to get used to him. She could feel him throbbing inside her and was grateful that despite how badly he wanted to pick up the pace he was taking his time. Slowly the pain faded away until she was a moaning mess.

"Faster."

He instantly obliged, grinding into her quicker and completely filling her up. Jane gave up any hope of trying to be quiet. So what if the neighbors heard? As long as his mom didn't come home early she planned on being as loud as she could so he wouldn't have a doubt in his mind that she wanted him. She moaned his name over and over and turned her head so she could kiss the side of his face.

"Holy shit, Jane."

"Mike."

His moans harmonized with her own better than any song ever written. She held his face and forced him to look at her. Whether it was her mind playing tricks on her or the fact that it was physically impossible for them to be any closer she was sure she could read his mind. Mike loved her. She had always wondered, usually leaning more towards "yes". But in that moment, his forehead only centimeters away from her own while he made love to her, she knew that he was just as sure that he didn't want anyone else as she was.

Her whole body started to tense as she approached her climax, a string of curses escaping her. Jane's nails dug into his back when he started to move faster. She could tell by his labored breathing that he was close too. All the blood rushed to her head as she got closer and she knew she would have to wait a while before attempting to sit up.

Jane practically screamed when she climaxed, the tension in her body releasing so fast that she deflated into the tangled blankets. He leaned down and kissed her again, only pumping into her a few more times before his body shivered and he too finished. She couldn't help but smile at his last couple of moans that were definitely louder than the rest.

Mike pulled out of her and tossed the condom into a trash can only a few feet away while she continued to catch her breath. "Holy shit."

"Holy shit." She agreed.

## 17. Officially Official

Sorry for the wait for this story! I've been working really hard on other stuff.

A quick note before this chapter starts. If you don't like the relationship between Mike and Jane in this story simply don't read it. While I'm very proud of the story I've created with them I understand it's not everyone's cup of tea. So if you think their relationship is toxic, or that Jane is just using him, I think that maybe this story isn't for you and you should check out another mileven AU.

Also I wrote this chapter a week before I got any such comment. Without spoiling anything you're about to read I thought to add all of this chapter in all on my own and without suggestion.

An extra special thanks today to everyone who likes this story :)

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Jane lay flat on her stomach while Mike was on his side facing her, his fingers trailing up and down her bare back. He kept waiting to wake up and realize that everything that had happened was a dream. It wouldn't have been the first time his subconscious imagined what his first time with Jane would be like. But his dreams about Jane were never so vivid and detailed. The sound of her moaning his name echoed in his ears and threatened to excite him all over again. Not that he wasn't open to the idea of a round 2. He just didn't think they had the time.

His first time with Jane was everything he had imagined and more. She was breathtakingly beautiful. And *god* the sounds she had made. How would he even stand a chance of keeping space between them in front of others. How the hell was he supposed to sit through a dinner with her and his family when the image of her naked and writhing with pleasure underneath him? The thought gave him anxiety so he kissed her shoulder to clear his mind.

Something strange was stuck with him as he watched her lay with her eyes closed and practically purred while he rubbed her back. He could have sworn that he had been able to read her mind when she

made him look at her. Mike had been certain that he had gotten a glimpse into her thoughts and had seen that she loved him almost as much as he loved her. With a clearer mind he was no longer so sure. But in the moment he had never been so certain of her feelings since he met her.

Jane smirked and pushed her now messy hair out of her face. "Took you long enough." She said.

He felt his cheeks go red. "Sorry."

She laughed and pushed his shoulder. "I'm just kidding. It was worth the wait." Jane turned on his side to face him and tilted her head up. "How bad is the damage?"

Mike winced at the sight of multiple hickeys that were already starting to turn purple. "Bad."

"Can I borrow a sweatshirt?"

"You mean steal?"

"Maybe."

Mike grinned at her and rolled out of bed, pulling his boxers on and going over to his dresser. In his peripheral vision he could see her pick her bra and underwear up from the floor while he searched for a hoodie he wouldn't miss. He found an older one he hadn't worn in at least a year and handed it to her once she had hooked her bra back on. It practically swallowed her and he felt his face go warm at how adorable she was.

She reached for his hand and pulled him towards her on the bed. "Your mom doesn't get home for another half hour." She said. "Come here."

He offered up no protest and gladly crawled into bed next to her. Jane pushed him down so he was flat on his back and straddled his waist. She tied her messy hair up while he held onto her thighs and ran his thumb across her skin. A content smile spread across her face that made his chest feel warm.

Her expression changed into something he struggled to read. "Hey Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Um..." her hands rested on his arms and he could feel that her palms were starting to sweat. "Do you wanna be my boyfriend?"

His heart stopped and for a moment he wondered if he had some sort of auditory hallucination. He sat up and leaned against his headboard, his eyes frantically searching her face. "Wait, what?" he asked. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, I'm serious." Jane said, a small smile replacing the nervousness in her face. "I kind of realized how stupid I was being all of a sudden. We've been doing this for a month and a half and nothing that I've been scared of has happened." She slid her hands up to rest on top of his. "You're such a good guy, Mike. I don't think I can find anyone better than you. I don't want to find anyone else. I want you to be my boyfriend."

Hearing who was probably the love of his life say she didn't want anyone else made every hair on his body stand on its end. After a month and a half with Jane he couldn't imagine himself finding someone who got him as well as she did. She knew exactly what to say when he was feeling insecure to make him feel more confident in what they had. She knew just how to drive him crazy in the best possible way. He was so used to tiptoeing around her fears he expected her to say "just kidding". But he could tell she was serious by the way she wouldn't look at him and how her fingers started to fidget with the sleeve of what was now her sweatshirt.

His hands grabbed a fist full of the baggy sweatshirt and he pulled her closer to him so he could kiss her. He smiled against her lips and struggled to contain how excited he was. "I would love to be your boyfriend, Jane."

She practically beamed at him, causing his stomach to do a backflip. "Cool."

They barely got time to react before the phone on his nightstand

started ringing. Jane groaned and rolled off of him while he reached over for the receiver, both expecting it to be someone in his family. Her legs were still tangled with his as he held the receiver between his ear and shoulder. "Hello?"

"Is Jane over?" Lucas' voice said from the other line.

He glanced over at her, his eyebrows pulling together. "Uh, yeah. Why?"

"Dude, you know your window is open right?"

Mike glanced over at his window across the room, his stomach sinking to the floor when he saw that he was indeed open. Even from where he sat on the bed he could see into the window of the Sinclair house down the hall from Lucas' room.

"Shit."

"Jesus Christ she's loud."

"Oh my god."

"You're damn lucky my family's out."

"I don't think I would have ever been able to look at them again."

Lucas laughed on the other line, Mike's cheeks only turning redder. He could feel Jane's eyes on him but he kept his face hidden in his hands. "Well now that you guys are done I have to start my homework." Lucas said. "Close your damn window next time."

Mike simply groaned in response and leaned over to hang the phone up. His face was still several shades of pink when he turned back towards Jane. "I left the window open."

Jane glanced across the room and shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry," she said very halfheartedly. She didn't seem sorry at all. "I forgot Lucas lived next door."

They decided to get dressed and go downstairs before his mom came home. While they sat on the couch watching tv Jane had her head on

his shoulder and her legs draped across his lap. Not for the first time Mike was in awe at how he had managed to get someone as amazing as her. He couldn't quite believe that she had decided to make things official with him. Mike didn't at all mind that they never had before, but he certainly didn't expect to feel so good when they did. He'd always been under the assumption that it wouldn't change anything between them. But the air around them felt different, and while they watched tv he could see her every so often look at him in a way that made his stomach do a backflip.

"You gonna tell your mom that we're dating or do I have to keep my hands off you all night?" Jane asked during a commercial break.

Mike shrugged only one shoulder since she had her head on the other. "I can tell her." he said, "I'm sure she'll be embarrassing about it."

"How?"

"She'll be surprised."

It was only ten minutes later that he could hear the sound of a car pulling into the driveway. Jane pulled her legs off him and set her feet on the floor. Since Mike had been home all day the front door was unlocked and his mom simply opened the door and walked in holding way more grocery bags than she could carry. "Michael, there's only three bags left in the car, would you mind getting- oh." She stopped dead in her tracks Jane sitting next to him on the couch, their shoulders and legs touching. "Hello."

Jane was the first to stand. It was likely only obvious to Mike but he could clearly tell she was worried. "Do you want help with those?" she asked once she reached his mom.

"Oh please, dear." She handed two bags off to Jane, who hurried into the kitchen to set them down. Mike could feel his mom's gaze staring holes into his head as he made his way over to her. "Who's that?"

"Jane." He answered, taking the rest of the bags since she seemed to still be struggling. "My girlfriend."

Mike was glad he took the bags from her since she was so shocked she might have dropped them. "Your *what?*" she whisper shouted. "When did this happen?"

"Officially? Today."

"Unofficially?"

"Like a month and a half ago."

Karen threw her arms up in the air before they dramatically dropped to her sides. Mike was glad Jane was still in the kitchen when he broke the news. "Mike, why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought I did." He lied

"You most certainly did *not*." She argued. "I think I would have remembered my son telling me about his first girlfriend." She pulled him into a tight hug, only making his face turn redder. "I can't believe this."

"It's not the apocalypse mom. It's not that hard to believe." He managed to pull himself out of her grip and start towards the kitchen. "I'll put these away."

Mike escaped down the hall and into the kitchen. He instantly spotted Jane leaning on the counter chewing on her bottom lip. She perked up when he came in and set the bags down next to the ones she had brought in. "I told her."

"And?"

He shrugged, wrapping his arm around her waist once he was next to her. "It went better than I thought it would." He spotted his mom out the window going to the car and leaned down to kiss Jane while she was still outside. "She was surprised, though."

"I hope she likes me." Jane said, keeping her arms around his waist.

"She will like you." What was there not to like about Jane Hopper? He couldn't think of anything. "You wanna go upstairs until dinner?"



She nodded and they hurried up the stairs and into his room while his mom was still outside. While they waited to be called back down they listened to the radio and lay on his bed. Mike was too scared to kiss her, nervous that after what they had done he wouldn't be able to stop himself. Jane didn't seem to share his worries and more than once rolled on top of him and initiated a quick make out session. Though she did him the favor of preventing things from going too far. Mike had spotted Lucas' moms car pull into the driveway and the thought that she would have heard had she been home was a bit of a mood killer.

A little after 6:30 there was a soft knock on his bedroom door before Nancy opened it and stepped inside with her hand covering her eyes. "Is it safe to come in?"

He rolled his eyes at her but Jane laughed next to him. "It's safe."

Nancy's hand dropped to her side and she glanced between the two. He guessed it was weird for her to actually see Jane when she mostly just listened to him talk about her. "Mom said dinner's ready and to come get you guys." She glanced over at Jane. "You sure you're prepared to be interrogated?"

She stood up off the bed. "My dad's a cop." She reminded her. "I've been interrogated once a day for six years."

On the way downstairs Mike reached for her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. Though he could tell that she was nervous he didn't dare to bring it up. He had learned that sometimes the best way to help Jane when her mind was in the gutter was to distract her from what was bothering her. While they made their way to the dining room he whispered in her ear that she looked cute in his sweatshirt and asked her if she wanted him to take the long way when he drove her home later that night.

The smell of lasagna and various cooked vegetables filled the entire first floor and he could see Jane inhale the scent when she thought he wasn't looking. He knew she was used to meals that were ordered on the phone and delivered to her house. Mike wondered if she or Hopper ever tried cooking. He couldn't quite imagine either of them wearing an apron and slaving away in the kitchen. Mike made a

mental note to offer to bring her some leftovers for lunch every so often.

She scooted her chair closer to his and held his hand under the table once they were all sitting. Nancy and his mom sat across from them. Holly was at a friend's house, which he was thankful for since she was more likely to spill the beans on how much he had talked about Jane than Nancy was. He noticed how his mom watched Jane's every move and noticed how Jane sat straighter and stiffer than usual. Mike bumped his foot against hers under the table.

"So how did you two meet?" his mom asked once they started eating.

Mike got flashbacks to a similar conversation when he had met Jim Hopper for the first time. "At a party." He answered simply.

"What a detailed description, Michael." She said. Though it was clear she was joking he could tell it was her way of asking for more.

"I was in the basement with the guys and she was there with her friend. We all started talking a little and then I saw her at school the next day." He raised an eyebrow at his mom. "Better?"

"Much." Karen turned her attention towards Jane. "Are you involved in any extra curriculars?"

He could see Jane swallowed hard. "I was at my old school. I was on the track team. I only did it because all my friends were but I ended up really liking it."

His mom nodded while she finished chewing. "Where did you used to go to school?"

"Chicago." She said. "That's where I grew up and met my dad."

"Oh, you're adopted?" Mike knew his mom already knew the answer. She knew all the gossip there was to know in Hawkins. He doubted she had forgotten something as juicy as the new chief with the adoptive daughter who arrived only a few years back. "How did you meet him?"

Mike watched her tense up again. He doubted his mom or Nancy

noticed since he only had because he was watching her really carefully. "Through his work." She answered simply.

He took it upon himself to change the subject. "Jane really likes literature." He said. "She's in honors English and gets really good grades."

Nancy perked up exactly like how he expected her to. "What's your favorite book?"

"Gatsby." She answered immediately. *What a shock.* "Though I just recently read *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I couldn't put it down. I read it in two days."

Nancy's eyes lit up. "I love Tennessee Williams. Did you read *Glass Menagerie*?"

"Oh of course." Jane said. "I read it in school Freshman year, but I've probably read it four times since."

"This one," Nancy pointed her fork at Mike from across the table, "hasn't read a book outside of school in probably years."

Jane gave him a pointed look. "Well I just gave him a book today so I hope he reads that."

And read he did. By 10 Mike was halfway through Jane's copy of the *Great Gatsby*. It wasn't a long book to begin with and her notes and highlighted lines encouraged him. Some of them were older and written in ink that began to fade. Others were obviously newer. Her annotations were like a look into her thoughts and Mike began taking notes in a notebook so he wouldn't forget the ones that stuck with him.

- "Human sympathy has its limits." *We're both turning into mom. How can she speak of her with poison in her voice and yet do everything she does? Jim wants me to cut her off. I want to save her.*

- "Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete." *Am I lying to him or myself? How am I supposed to be his friend when every time I look at him I think about how he kissed me? If he doesn't do it again soon I think I might*

*explode.*

- "All the bright precious things fade so fast, and they don't come back." *Childhood.*

- "She was incurably dishonest." *Is it immoral to hate who created you? I don't think I care.*

- "But his heart was in a constant, turbulent riot." *Me.*

- "I was too absorbed to be responsive" *I am immersed in him. There isn't an inch of my soul that he hasn't touched.*

- "Getting deeper in love every minute, and all of a sudden I didn't care." *Mike Wheeler.*

Mike didn't look at the clock until he read the last line of the book. It was well after midnight but he was wide awake. He was incurably in love with Jane Hopper. His whole body felt warm at every quote she had associated with him. Mike wished he could read a whole book of her thoughts. For someone who was so scared of saying certain words she certainly knew how to use them on paper.

He hugged the book close to his chest since she wasn't there for him to hold. Mike promised himself he would never let anyone say a negative word about Jane in his presence again. He would gladly get his ass kicked a hundred times as long as it meant that the world knew he wasn't going to let anyone speak to her the way Troy had the day before. Even long after she got sick of him. He would defend Jane Hopper until there was no one left to defend her from.

## 18. A Wonderful Christmas Time pt 1

hoy crap I'm so sorry I haven't updated this story in so long! I hit a really bad wall of writers block with this story that hopefully is gone for now. I'll try to plan out the last couple chapters so it doesn't happen again. That being said I hope you guys like this update! As usual I didn't proofread lol

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*December 23rd 1988*

The Wheeler house had always been the designated hangout spot for Mike and his friends. That didn't change once Max and Jane were added into the group. He spent all of Christmas Eve running around and making sure every last decoration was perfect. He was even more nervous than he had been the year before. It was the first of what he hoped was many holidays he would spend with Jane. He wanted it to be as perfect as possible. They had intended on her coming over as early as possible but she called him at noon in a panic that a present she had lined up for someone had fallen through and that she had to rush to figure something else out.

Mike jumped out of his skin when he heard the doorbell ring for the first time at half past 5. He wiped his palms on his hands as he headed for the front door. When he opened it up and spotted Max on his doorstep he was a bit surprised to find her by herself and without Lucas, who she'd been dating officially for a few weeks.

She looked up at the doorway and smirked at the mistletoe hanging above their heads. "You trying to tell me something, Wheeler?"

"Technically it's for Nancy's boyfriend." He said as he stepped to the side to let her in.

She set the presents she held on the table next to the door. "Don't you think your girlfriend should know you play for the other team?"

"I'm the wrong person to use a sports analogy with."

"If I had more time I would have tried to think of a *Star Wars* one but

you're kind of putting me on the spot." She set her jacket on the coat rack. "Anyone else here?"

"Nope, you came first."

A wide grin spread on her face. "Good." She said, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him into the kitchen. "I have an early present for you. One you're gonna want me to give you without anyone around."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "You do know I have a girlfriend, right?"

"Oh I'm well aware." She said, letting go of his arm and leaning on the wall next to the phone. "My present may or may not have something to do with her."

"I'm officially confused."

She only smirked at him and picked up the receiver, dialing a familiar number. "She told me something you're gonna wanna hear. And I don't think she has the guts to say it to you. I figured I'd do both of you a favor."

He opened his mouth to ask her more questions but she shushed him and pulled him closer so they could both listen in. The line rang longer than usual before he heard a familiar but out of breath voice. "Hello?"

"Hey, you get the present emergency figured out?" Max asked.

Jane sighed. "Yeah finally. I'm still really upset, though. It was a group gift for all the guys so I had to buy four new things. But everything's wrapped and ready to go, I'm only getting dressed now."

"You gonna wear something cute?" Max teased.

"I hope so." Jane replied, sounding uncertain. "It's definitely different. I hope he likes it."

"You could show up in a garbage bag and Mike would still drool over you." Jane laughed and a beat of silence between them followed. "So... you gonna tell him what you told me the other day?"

He heard Jane groan. "How many times are we gonna have this conversation?"

"Until you come to your senses. What's the big deal?"

"I'm having flashbacks to when you were trying to get me to get over my commitment phobia."

"And look at you now! *You* asked *him* out. What's the worst that can happen?"

"The worst that can happen is that I can scare him off."

Max must have figured out how thoroughly confused Mike was since she started pushing her harder. "Don't you think he deserves to know?"

"He knows."

"Does he? You're too scared to say it that you won't even tell me. How is he supposed to know?"

"I make it pretty obvious."

"You make what obvious?"

"That I love him, okay Max?" Jane half shouted. "That I'm stupidly in love with him! Is that what you want to hear?"

"Precisely."

Jane let out a long sigh. He could see the look on her face as clearly as if she were standing in front of him. "Look, tonight's not the night. Not with you guys there at least."

"You still spending the night?"

"If his parents are still out of town yeah. Make sure you cover for me if my dad calls."

"Obviously. Don't forget to bring protection."

"Thanks *mom*. See you later."

"See ya." Max hung up the phone and turned to a speechless Mike with a wide smile. "Merry Christmas Wheeler."

xXx

Almost an hour and a half later, after almost all their friends had shown up, Mike was still reeling from what he had heard on the phone. *That I'm stupidly in love with him.* Every time he thought about what Jane had said his heart pounded in his chest. How was he supposed to be around her and pretend like he hadn't heard? Should he even bother? Every so often he would catch Max's eye and she would grin at him. Neither of them had told anyone else. For the time being it was a secret between them, the best Christmas present he could ever get.

Mike was an antsy mess while he waited for Jane to show up. He sprung out of his chair when the doorbell rang the last time. Everyone else was already there. It could only be Jane. He hurried out of the basement and to the front door, taking a few shaky breaths to try and calm himself down. He grabbed the door knob and yanked it open and no amount of deep breaths could have prepared him for seeing Jane on his doorstep.

She had her backpack on and was holding a large shopping bag in one of her hands, one containing her overnight clothes and one presents. Her hair was tied up into a high pony tail, since her hair was finally long enough for her to do so. But his jaw practically dropped open when he saw what she was wearing. Underneath her jacket she had on a red dress that went halfway down her thighs with a scooped neck. He could even tell that she was wearing mascara, which she'd never done before.

"Hi." She said bashfully when he simply stared at her without a word.

"Holy shit."

Jane laughed and waved goodbye to her father's tuck down at the end of the road. Mike moved out of the way so she could come inside. She set her bags on the floor and shrugged her jacket off to put on the coat rack. The dress hugged her slim waist and flared out of her hips. Was she trying to torture him? "I told him that everyone's



spending the night so we're still good to go for tonight."

As soon as Mike found out his parents were going on a two day trip before Christmas Eve he and Jane concocted a plan for her to spend the night. He had bluntly asked Nancy to spend the night at Johnathan's house so that he could be alone with Jane and not have to worry about anyone else being around. All their friends knew about the plan and while they had to endure a bit of teasing they knew that they would have the house to themselves. Not only were they spending the night together but his parents had invited Jane and her dad over for Christmas Day dinner. He hoped she wouldn't get sick of him.

Mike cupped her face in his hands and kissed her, thankful she hadn't put lipstick on. As much as he loved her in combat boots and ripped jeans she looked completely breathtaking in a dress. He remembered what she'd said on the phone when Max asked her if she was wearing something cute. *I hope he likes it.* How could he not?

A smile spread on her lips just before he pulled away. Something in her face was so familiar yet so different somehow. He wrote it off as her change in appearance. "You look great." He said.

A shy smile spread on her face. Not that she wasn't used to his compliments. He gave them to her often. But she wasn't usually so worried about the way she looked. Mike could tell she needed to hear it. "Thanks." She said. Her fingers ran along the neck of his sweater. "This is cute."

"My mom got it for me." He admitted.

"Karen has good taste. Tell her to get me one to match."

She was kidding but they both knew his mom would do it if they asked.

Jane held onto his hand as they made their way down the basement steps and back to their friends. They seemed just as shocked by her outfit as Mike had been. Dustin made a whooping noise once they made it downstairs and Jane went as red as her dress. She kicked off her shoes and threw one at him before collapsing on the arm chair

she and Mike squeezed together to share.

"Who are you and what have you done with Jane?" Will asked her.

"I tied her up and locked her in my garage." She replied sarcastically. "She wanted to wear her pajamas so I'm stepping in for her for the night."

They all burst out in a fit of laughter. Mike once again shared a look with Max, who wore a wide knowing smile. He couldn't help but wonder how often the two girls talked about him. And not just Jane mentioning what movie they'd gone to see after school. *Really* talked about him. When Max brought him up Jane had said 'how many times are we going to talk about this', implying that they'd specifically talked about her being in love with him at least a handful of times. Mike made a note to ask Max about it at some point that night.

The first thing they did was exchange their gifts. Max got him some new tapes for his Walkman, some of which she confirmed she'd gotten him to branch out his music taste. Dustin, Lucas, and Will all chipped in and bought him the NEs Nintendo and despite it being a slightly outdated product he was still incredibly excited about. Dustin assured him that one of the conditions of the gift was letting them use it, which he expected.

When Jane handed him her gift he noticed her cheeks beginning to turn pink. "I know they're gonna tease me for this." She said quietly so their friends wouldn't notice over their own chatter.

Mike unwrapped his gift as carefully and quietly as he could to not attract their friends attention, wondering what Jane could have gotten him that would make them tease her. He glanced sideways at her when the paper came off to reveal a small photo album. Mike opened the cover and flipped through the pages, finding the ticket to every movie they'd seen together and even a few receipts from when they went out to dinner.

"You kept all these?" He asked, lingering on a receipt from when they'd gone to Benny's together the first time.

Jane shrugged, her shoulder moving against his own. "I'm surprisingly sentimental."

"I can see that." Mike wrapped his arm around her shoulders and planted a kiss on top of her head. "I love it, thank you."

"You're welcome." She said. Mike could hear the smile in her voice. "I'm excited for tonight. Do you wanna have a movie marathon?"

"Yeah, sure. We can watch whatever you want."

In the time that they'd been together they'd managed to watch almost every good movie Mike had on the shelf on the other side of the room so he had a feeling they would be re watching something. Which was fine with him. Mike hardly cared what they did as long as they were spending time together.

The group spent most of the night passing around snacks and drinking hot chocolate out of mugs in the Wheeler basement. Since they were planning on taking a trip to Chicago for New Years, and probably spending a night or drinking, they decided to have a relatively low key night. They watched all the cheesy Christmas movies on TV and reminisced about past holidays they'd spent together, before Jane and Max had joined the group.

As the credits for *A Christmas Story* started to roll Will turned the volume down before turning to the rest of the group. "We have to start planning the Chicago trip before we put it off too long that we can't go. Knowing us we definitely would."

Jane sat up from leaning against Mike's chest. "I have a whole list of local places you guys have to go to, but there's a couple other things we can do."

"Things like what?" Dustin asked, "I've never got the chance to go to Chicago before."

"Well there's an art museum that's really cool, it has a lot of really nice pieces." Jane explained. There's a few pretty famous parks and buildings we can go to. There's also a tour about Chicago crime and mafia that I've done a few times and it's really interesting."

Max perked up at the mention of the crime tour. "We definitely have to do that." She said.

"If it's not too cold we can visit this one really big beach that's pretty popular." Jane continued, "Plus a friend of mine I kept in touch with promised to hook us up with some drinks, which should keep us busy for a couple of nights."

"Your friend is a godsent." Lucas said. "Even though I'm driving us down I don't plan on being the designated driver the whole time so please tell me the buses there are reliable."

Jane let out a laugh, "Very reliable." She assured him, "And there's so many stops so we can pretty much go anywhere. Did everyone's families say okay?"

Everyone nodded, much to their relief. As far as Mike knew all of his friends have pretty lenient parents when it came to them making plans. But going to a party and taking a three day out of state trip were two very different things and he had been nervous that someone wouldn't have been able to go. He was confident that they were all in agreement that if they all couldn't go none of them would go. They all seemed to breathe a sigh of relief that the plans were still on. When he glanced at Jane he could see how excited she was. She didn't need to tell him how happy she was that people who were important to her would get to see where she grew up. He gave her hand a light squeeze, just as excited as she seemed to be.

## 19. A Wonderful Christmas Time pt 2

Welcome to the second to last chapter of this story. This chapter absolutely *sucks* and I wish I had added it on to the end of the last one but oh well. I'll try to make sure the last chapter isn't as horrendous as this one is. Anyway, I hope you enjoy!

---

Mike and Jane stood in the foyer of his house watching their friends put on their jackets and get ready to leave, both attempting to contain their excitement for being left alone. Though they didn't seem to be doing a very good job at it considering the looks they received every few minutes. As they made their way upstairs Will had whispered in Mike's ear asking if he had protection for that night. Instead of replying he simply gave him a shove.

After she got her jacket on Mike held out the bag of presents he'd been holding for Max. "Thanks for coming over." He told her, "And... you know." As subtly as he could he glanced sideways at his girlfriend who was giving out goodbye hugs and last thanks for her presents.

Max grinned at him. "Yeah, no problem." She said, zipping her jacket up to her chin. "You gonna say something to her?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe," he admitted, "I just don't want to push her, you know? Obviously there's a reason she hasn't said it yet."

"Of course there's a reason. But you know what it is. I think she *needs* a push." She shrugged and shoved her hands in her pockets. "But it's up to you, Wheeler. I'd say let me know what happens but I'm sure she'll call me and tell me if anything happens."

"Good to know she keeps you updated on our private life." Mike joked.

"That's what best friends are for."

Mike rolled his eyes at her and said a goodbye to the rest of his

friends. When they opened the door a gust of cold wind blew into the house and Mike and Jane stood in the doorway hugging themselves while they watched their friends hurry to their cars. Once everyone's headlights were on and they were backing out of the driveway they waved one last time before shutting the door and cutting off the cold air.

With their friends gone the only sound in the house was the radio downstairs in the basement playing Christmas music. Jane turned to him, a wide and infectious smile spreading on her face. It was only a little after 10:30 and she was leaving the next day around 1, giving them just about fifteen hours together totally alone. She reached for his hand and pulled him towards her, pressing a kiss on his lips.

"What the hell are we gonna do with so much time?" she asked, her smile only growing.

"Realistically? Probably just watch movies and eat snacks all night."

Jane let out a laugh and grabbed his hand, leading him back down to the basement with her. Thankfully they had already cleaned up most of the empty snack bags and ripped up wrapping paper. It didn't take long for the two of them to finish straightening up and bring a garbage bag outside. They hurried back into the basement once everything was cleaned up and stood in front of the movie shelf, Jane looking over titles while Mike simply watched her out of the corner of his eye.

For what felt like the millionth time he wondered what on earth he had done right to be with someone so wonderful. Jane was like something straight out of a dream. He sometimes expected to suddenly wake up and find out that their entire relationship had been a figment of his imagination. Mike was certain that if he had to go back to how his life had been before the party at Jennifer Hayes' house he would go absolutely mad.

Seeing Jane reach for a movie on the shelf out of his peripheral vision snapped him out of his train of thought. Mike looked over her shoulder to see what she had chosen, smiling when she picked out *Dirty Dancing*. "That's not a Christmas movie, you know." He pointed it.

"Yeah, I know." She said, taking the VHS out of the box and walking over to the television, kneeling down in front of it and sliding the tape in. "We watched this the first time you ever came to my house, remember?"

"Of course I do." Mike said, sitting on the couch and leaving enough room for her next to him. "I also remember thinking I was gonna pass out when your dad got home."

Jane stood up with a wide grin and happily joined him on the couch. "And look at you now, two peas in a pod."

It was true. Almost every time Mike was over at her house when Chief Hopper got home from a shift he stayed for dinner. Mike was far from a pro at talking to adults, especially when those adults were the parent of his girlfriend. But talking to Hopper was almost as easy as talking to Jane. It probably helped that they all knew that Hopper thought Mike was a good influence on her. She was too busy hanging out with him and going on dates to get herself into too much trouble. Not to mention he'd also helped her bump some of her grades up in her math class.

"I'd ask you to come to Christmas dinner at our house but your mom is such a good cook and you know how shit my dad and I are." Jane said, draping a blanket across their legs and resting her head on his shoulder.

"Maybe you guys could come to our Christmas dinner." Mike suggested as the opening credits started to play. "It would certainly make it more bearable."

She tilted her head up to look at him, still resting on his shoulder. "Really? You'd want us to come?"

Mike scoffed at her surprise. "Of course I'd want you guys to come!" he said, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Nancy and I spend the whole night hiding from our family in our room until the last possible second so it would be nice to have more people around that we actually like."

"Nancy likes me?"

"If she wasn't dating Johnathan I'd think she'd try to steal you from me."

Jane laughed and gently smacked his arm before they both fell silent and watched the movie.

Though Mike found himself struggling to pay attention to the plot. The conversation between Max and Jane had been playing in his mind on repeat for hours on end. Despite Max's reassurance that he should be the one to bring it up Mike was still hesitant. How was he supposed to bring it up without admitting that he'd listened in on their private conversation. Would she be mad at him? Or Max? She had just been trying to help them, the last thing Mike wanted was for her to get in trouble for it.

But as her words echoed in his ear Mike felt his heart start to pound inside her chest. *I'm stupidly in love with him.* It was as if Jane had read his own thoughts out loud. He was terrifyingly smitten with her. When he thought about how strongly his feelings for her had grown in such a short period of time he was shocked. Mike would have never thought anyone could fall in love in a mere two months. Had he never met Jane he likely would have gone to his grave with the very same belief.

Mike knew he had to tell her somehow. But beating around the bush was yet another thing he was bad at.

"Did you have fun tonight?" Mike asked once the dialogue stopped and a song played over one of the scenes.

Jane nodded, the top of her head rubbing against his jaw. "Definitely. Probably the best Christmas since I got adopted." She turned and looked up at him, a small and adorable smile on her face. "Did you have fun?"

"Definitely." He said, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

"I had a much better present idea for you guys but it fell through at the last second, so I'm a little bummed about that." Jane admitted. "But I'm saving it for next year so don't even bother asking what it was."



Mike laughed, "Okay, I won't." he said. "I think Max mentioned it to me when she got here."

"She didn't tell you what it was though, right?" she asked, immediately sounding worried.

"No, no she didn't tell me." Mike assured her. "But she got here kind of early so she used the phone in the kitchen. I heard her ask you about it and she just told me not to worry about it, that it didn't work out."

"You were there when she called me?" Jane asked him. Mike swallowed a nervous lump in his throat and nodded. "You didn't... hear anything did you?"

"No." Mike said. "Would I have heard something interesting if I had listened in?"

He felt Jane deflate when she let out a sigh of relief. "Nope, nothing interesting." She said.

Mike's heart sank down to his stomach. Why wasn't she telling him? Did she seriously think he didn't feel the same way? Jane was far from stupid, but if she was truly convinced that Mike didn't love her she was thinking like an idiot.

The irrational, self conscious part of his brain whispered that there was a chance she hadn't meant what she said on the phone to Max. That she'd only said it because it was what she wanted to hear. The thought made his stomach churn over and made it difficult to breathe. Mike shifted underneath her, getting ready to stand up. "I'm gonna make some popcorn and hot chocolate, I'll be right back."

Jane sat up so he could stand. "Okay." She said, walking over to the television and pausing the movie. "I'll wait for you."

Mike was unable to manage much more than a smile before ascending the stairs.

He turned on the kettle and set the popcorn in the microwave, sitting at the kitchen table and resting his forehead in his hands. Mike appreciated what Max had been trying to do but he suddenly wished

she hadn't bothered. He had a tendency to get into his own head and overcomplicate even the simplest things. When it came to more complex issues, such as telling his girlfriend that he was in love with her, he was so good at overcomplicating things that he felt an anxiety attack start to come over him as he sat in the kitchen.

Mike took deep breaths in an attempt to calm himself down. He had no clue how long he sat there for, and likely would have been there for hours had he not heard the creaky floorboard in the doorway of the kitchen. He turned in his chair to face Jane standing only a few feet away, hugging the sweatshirt she had borrowed from him that she had on over her dress. His anxiety spiked at the look on her face, instantly worrying she was going to confirm his fears that she hadn't meant it.

"You've been acting weird all night." She told him, leaning against the kitchen doorway. "You heard the phone call didn't you?"

Mike swallowed a lump in his throat, slowly nodding his head.

Jane let out a sigh, tilting her head back and looking up at the ceiling. "I'm gonna kill Max the next time I see her." she muttered under her breath, then picked her head back up and looked at him. "You weren't supposed to hear it like that."

"But... you meant it?"

"Is that a joke?"

"No."

Jane laughed and crossed her arms under her chest. "Of *course* I meant it." She said, "Mike, you're everything to me. I have absolutely no idea what I'd do without you. You're the most amazing person I've ever met, how could I not fall in love with you?"

Mike let out a sigh of relief so strong he could have crumpled on the floor right then and there. He pushed himself to his feet and crossed the short distance between them, wrapping Jane up in his arms and holding her tightly against his chest while he buried his face in her neck. "I love you, Jane." He told her, his voice coming out muffled.

"God, I love you so much."

He felt her throw her arms around his neck, a short laugh coming out of her. "Really?"

"You mean it's not totally obvious?"

"No." she said, laughing again. "It wasn't obvious that I did?"

"Not really."

Jane pulled away from him, her eyes running over his face for a moment, before she put her hands on her cheeks and kissed him. Mike had only known Jane Hopper for two months of his short life but he was 100% certain that there was no one else he wanted to spend the rest of it with.

## 20. New Year, New City

Welcome to the very anti climactic end to this story! Thank you to everyone who's made it this far and taken the time out of their day to favorite, follow, review, or just read this story. I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

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After a nearly 3 hour car ride the party finally walked into the Swissotel in downtown Chicago. Thanks to the large windows on the front wall the lobby was brightly lit with natural light. Along the back wall behind the front desk bright purple light cast colorful shadows across the hotels logo. There were a few business men in suits sitting at a table but other than them and the receptionists behind the desk the lobby was empty. The six teens were buzzing with excitement as they dragged their luggage behind them to check in. Mike and Jane, Lucas and Max, and Dustin and Will were sharing three rooms next to each other on the first floor.

Jane took the room key from the receptionist and she and Mike eagerly went down the hall to find their room. They struggled to keep their voices down in the quiet hallway, not wanting to disturb any other guests. But they could hardly contain their excitement.

Their room was decently sized, with a couch and television as well as a queen sized bed. When she made it to the middle of the room Jane collapsed onto the bed facing the ceiling, a content sigh escaping her lips. Mike set both their suitcases against the wall before laying on his side facing her, studying her profile.

"I can't believe we pulled having the house and a hotel room to ourselves in two weeks." Jane said, turning her head to look at him. Seeing such a wide smile on her face made his stomach do backflips. "Seems like someone high up is on our side."

"Seems that way." Mike agreed. "Hey, you sure you're okay with all this?"

Jane's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"Being back in Chicago." he explained. "Are you sure it isn't going to bring anything up for you or make you upset?"

In the days following Christmas Jane told him more about her life before Hawkins than she ever had before. About how in between when she got taken from her mother and when Hopper adopted her that she had to live in a foster home. She told him stories about how the older kids teased her and how lonely she was the year and a half she had been there. How the stress of feeling like she had to choose between her mother and her sister had taken a toll on her. About the neighborhood she had grown up in, which definitely wasn't as nice or as nice as safe as Hawkins.

"Maybe I'm a little nervous." Jane admitted, something she wouldn't have done two months earlier. "But it was a long time ago, and I'm pretty much a completely different person now. And I have you guys here with me." She reached for his hand. "Don't worry about me."

"Don't even bother, you know I will anyway."

"Yeah, I know." Jane said laughing. She turned onto his side to face him, inching closer. "I am glad we all did this. It's gonna be fun getting to do all the small things we can't do in a small town."

"God I can't wait." Mike said. "I think I'm suffocating in Hawkins. You might find my unconscious one day and have to do mouth to mouth."

Jane laughed again but instead of continuing the joke, like she normally did, she went a more serious route. "Would you wanna go to school somewhere else? Maybe somewhere in the city?"

Truthfully Mike hadn't put much thought into college at all. The most planning he'd done was taking the SAT's back in September. College was something Mike had secretly been dreading since Sophomore year. Though he would likely never admit it he was terrified of failing. Sure, he was a smart kid. And he did alright with his grades. But that was with a high school education. And it was so secret that his mental state had an affect on his performance in school. What if he had a full blown nervous breakdown when he started college and flunked out in his first year?

But of course there was no way he was going to say any of it to Jane. They'd gone to Chicago to get away from Hawkins, even if only for a couple days. There was time to worry about college when they went home.

"I haven't really thought about it at all." Mike ended up saying. "But going to the city sounds cool. Different, but cool."

"Maybe.. We could go somewhere together?" Jane asked. If her voice didn't show enough how nervous she was to offer up the suggestion the look on her face was a dead giveaway. "It doesn't even have to be Chicago. It can be anywhere."

Mike couldn't keep an ear to ear grin off his face. How had he ended up so lucky. "That would be amazing."

Jane's face lit up like a lightbulb and suddenly Mike wasn't so scared about college.

xXx

Hours later, when the sky had turned dark and the air had gone cold, the six teens sat in the grass in one of the parks uptown. Half empty bottles inside paper bags sat beside them, long forgotten once they had drank enough. Though they tried to stay quiet so they wouldn't attract any attention to themselves and risk getting trouble they failed miserably. Jane and Max were a giggling mess at almost anything anyone said and Dustin, who was already loud sober, had turned the volume up at least two notches.

Though they had a whole day and a half left in Chicago they managed to cram every tourist attraction they planned in one day. After they'd finished everything Jane met up with a friend of hers that handed over a case of beer and they made their way to the park. There weren't many people around to begin with so it was easy to find a spot all for themselves. They sat at the edge of a large pond that was, for the most part frozen over. Though the cold air nipped at every inch of exposed skin it seemed none of them had any plans of going back to the hotel any time soon.

Jane suddenly sat up, pushing back some of the curls that had fallen

in her face. "New Years Eve is tomorrow." she announced, her words coming out fairly slurred. "We should all say what our resolutions are for this year."

"I don't have a stupid resolution." Dustin said, practically laying in the grass.

"Then make a stupid resolution." Jane shot back.

They all sat in silence for a few minutes as they thought over what they wanted to do in the upcoming year. Mike wasn't usually one to make New Years resolutions, but his alcohol clouded brain thought that maybe it was time he finally tried to stick to one. Even though there was a chance he might not remember what the resolution was when he woke up in the morning.

"I guess I have one." Will said bashfully, breaking the quiet. Mike could tell he regretted speaking up by the way he shrunk down when all eyes landed on him. "I want to take art more seriously and try to start an art portfolio for college. I might not be able to go to art school but I can still major in it."

"You can go to art school." Max assured him, too intoxicated to sit up on her own. She'd been leaning against Lucas for almost a half hour, coming close to falling over a few times. "You're seriously skilled, Byers. You could get your stuff in a museum."

Will's face turned cherry red and he muttered a quiet "thanks."

"I'll go next." Max said, attempting to sit up. She was somewhat successful with Lucas' help. "I wanna stand up to my brother more. I'm sick of him thinking he can bully me around and do whatever he wants."

"Hell yeah." Jane agreed. "Billy sucks. I can kick his ass for you if you want."

"Like how you did to Troy Harrington?"

Mike turned and looked at Jane. "You beat up Troy Harrington? When?"

She waved him off, shaking her head. "The past is the past. Who I beat up before doesn't matter. What *does* matter is who I'm gonna beat up next, and it's Billy."

"Nice try, Hopper, but I'm not letting you fight this battle for me." Max said, collapsing against Lucas' side again. "Who's next?"

"I guess I'll go." Lucas said, taking a quick swig from the bottle in his hands and setting it down in the grass in front of him. "I wanna get more hours at work and try to save up for college. I don't want my parents to have to pay for the whole thing."

"Isn't that a parent's job?" Dustin asked.

Lucas rolled his eyes at him. "Yeah, if you're spoiled."

They all laughed loudly at the joke but Dustin didn't think it was very funny, typical when it was directed at him. "Whatever, asshole."

"What's your resolution, Dustin?" Will asked

Dustin shrugged, clearly not the biggest fan of the topic of conversation. "I don't know, get straight B's next semester I guess." If it weren't for English Dustin's report card would have been immaculate.

"That's an awesome goal." Jane said, leaning back so she was propped up on her shoulders. "I can tutor you in English if you ever need."

"I'll definitely be taking you up on that offer."

Jane kicked her foot against Mike's to get his attention, smiling when he looked over at her. "What's your resolution?"

"You go first." Mike said, "This was all your idea anyway."

"Fine." Jane cleared her throat for dramatic effect. "My New Years resolution is to be better at expressing myself and doing other things outside of my comfort zone. Like this." she waved her hand around, indicating the trip they were on. She then looked over at Mike again. "Your turn."



Mike let out a sigh, realizing that there was no way he'd be able to get out of making a resolution now that all his friends had. Since he'd never bothered to make one before he had no idea what it should be. And going by how Lucas and Dustin's resolutions differed from Jane and Max's Mike had a feeling it could be anything, which only made him feel more lost.

"I guess my resolution is..." his voice trailed off as his gaze fell down to the ground. Had he been sober he would have been too embarrassed to even think of saying it out loud. But thanks to his intoxicated brain he was just able to get it out with his face undoubtedly bright red. "To not let what people say or think about me bother me so much."

There was a beat of silence before Jane reached for his hand and gave it a light squeeze of encouragement. "I think that's a really good goal, Mike." All their friends made gagging noises as Jane leaned over and planted a kiss on his cheek.

xXx

By midnight Mike and Jane were back in their hotel room changed into pajamas and halfway asleep. Jane was on her back, struggling to stay awake and watching the television out of the corner of her eye while Mike lay facing her with his eyes mostly closed. Before drinking so much they'd planned on staying up as long as possible and enjoying what would be their first night alone for awhile. But Mike had a feeling they wouldn't even make it until 2 am.

"How was your first night in Chicago?" Jane asked him, her voice groggy and quiet.

"I've been to Chicago before."

"Yeah, when you were twelve."

Mike grinned and nudged her arm. "Shut up." he mumbled. "I like it. I'm glad we did this." he opened his eyes to look at her, loving the sleepy look on her face. "You and I should go somewhere over the summer. Just the two of us."

Jane's smile doubled in size. "Yeah. Let's do that." she groaned quietly as she rolled onto her side to face him. "I love you."

"I love you too."

"I should have told you sooner." she said, wrapping her arms around his waist and leaning her forehead against hers. "I should have done a lot of things differently. I still feel so stupid for being so scared of a label."

Mike shook his head. "Jane, it's fine." he assured her. "I don't care, I never did. All I cared about was that you wanted to be with me." he pushed a curl that had fallen loose from the bun she had tied up behind her ear. "You can stop beating yourself up about it now."

She smiled at him but he could tell his words didn't quite get through to her. "Fine." she said, not sounding certain at all. "But I'm gonna make up for it and tell how amazing I think you are every day forever."

"I won't complain."

Her smile grew and seemed more genuine than before. "You know, you've absolutely ruined the idea of dating for me. Completely tarnished it."

Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "How so."

"There's no way anyone's ever going to be able to measure up to you." she explained. "I could meet every other person in the world and I'll never be as interested in them as I am with you. Not even close."

It was like she took the words right out of his mouth. Jane was extraordinary. How could anyone ever compete with her? They simply couldn't. Mike had no way of knowing how Jane would feel in five years time, or even five months, but he knew for a fact that Jane was it for him. He couldn't find a girl better than her even if he designed one in his head. She was perfectly flawed and an absolute ideal match for him.

"I feel like one day I'm gonna wake up and everything with you is gonna be a dream." Mike said, his eyes threatening to close once

more. "And we're gonna go back to being strangers and I'm gonna have to get you to fall in love with me all over again."

Jane put her hands on his cheeks and kissed his forehead. "I'll be here when you wake up. I promise." she said, then rested her head in the crook of his neck. "And if that ever happened I'd fall in love with you again every single time."